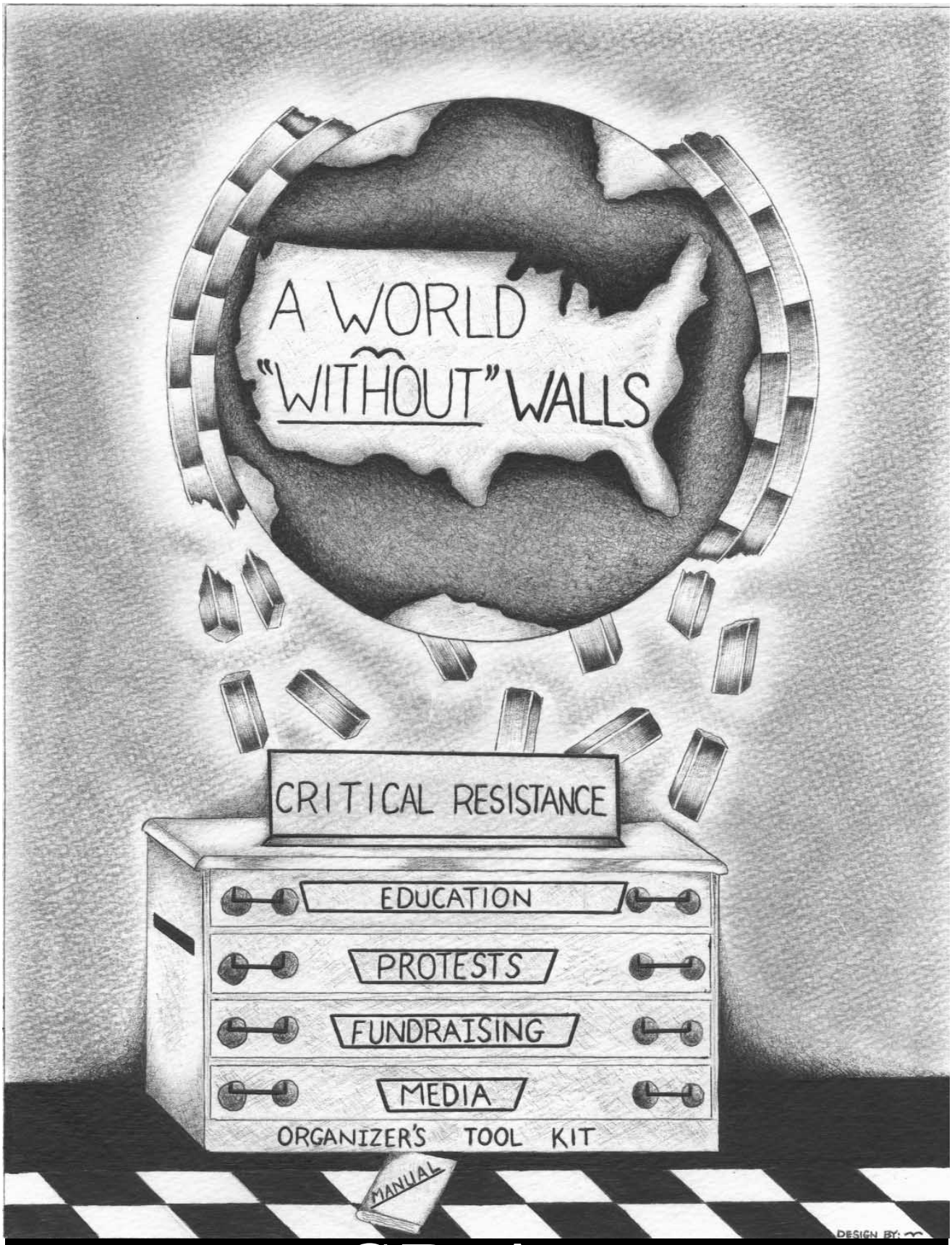

THE CR ABOLITION ORGANIZING TOOLKIT

Acknowledgements

MANY HANDS, VOICES, AND MINDS CONTRIBUTED TO THIS TOOLKIT.

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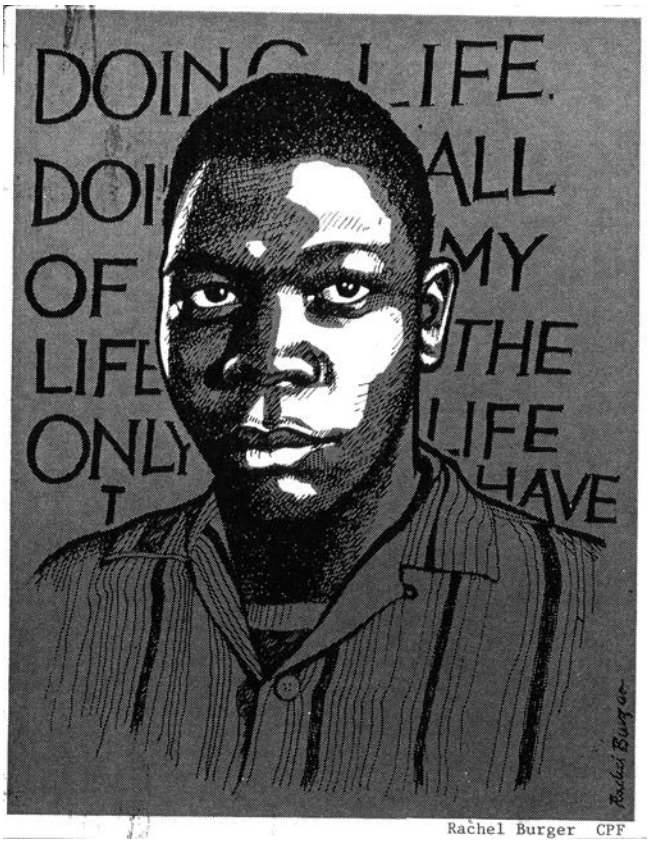

Rachel Burger CPF

MANY PEOPLE'S WISDOM WAS CAUGHT by our mini disc recorder and helped shape the tone of the kit. Thanks to: Dan Berger, Rose Braz, Mimi Budnick, Melissa Burch, Masai Ehehosi, Linda Evans, Craig Gilmore, Pilar Maschi, Brigette Sarabi, Julia Sudbury, and Linda Thurston.

DURING THE SUMMER OF 2003, Jason Glick interned with Critical Resistance and helped us push this project through to completion. His research, interview skills, and good humor about never ending editing have left a definite mark on this kit.

Introduction

This toolkit emerged out of discussions that began in Boston in March 2002. Members of Critical Resistance (CR) and partner organizations gathered for a roundtable discussion on abolitionist organizing strategies. One of the things that we agreed we needed to strengthen our work was a set of ideas, exercises, and resources to share with the people we organize with that would explain the idea of abolishing the prison industrial complex (PIC) and would help us take concrete steps toward that goal.

The kit is not a step-by-step guide to PIC abolition. It is a kit designed primarily for U.S.-based community organizers already working toward abolition and our allies. However, we hope it will be useful even for people who may not have thought much about abolition or who feel unsure about how useful it is as a goal.

We have put the toolkit together to be used as a whole or in pieces, depending on the situation. It could be used to help structure a roundtable discussion, like the one we had in Boston. You could pull out individual information sheets or exercises to use in a workshop. The kit could be used as a set of training materials to help people understand the idea of PIC abolition. It could also work as a set of materials to help strengthen ongoing abolitionist organizing.

Inside the toolkit, you'll find general information sheets to help make the connections between PIC abolition and other social justice struggles. You will find strategies for talking about and planning for abolitionist work. You will find exercises to try out some of those strategies. You will find ideas about alternatives to the PIC. You will find definitions of the terms we use. You will find lists about other things to read and people to call for more ideas. The quotes found in sidebars throughout the kit are pulled from interviews with abolitionist and anti-PIC organizers and from statements wirtten by survivors of violence who do work against the PIC. The survivor statements can be found in full in the appendix, and we hope to make a CD of the interviews available soon. (If you'd like a copy, please contact us.)

Finally, this toolkit is not an ending point, but a place to start thinking about these issues. It is a living document that you should add to continually as you discover more ideas and materials that help you take concrete steps toward PIC abolition. If you come across an exercise that you think gets to the heart of the issue, send it our way. If you hear about a great group working to end the PIC, let us know. If you develop pamphlets or talking points or keywords that make doing this work easier, give us a call. We need as many tools as we can get to fight this fight. Please use the feedback forms at the end of this kit to help us keep making it a more useful tool. Make as many copies of that form as you like and keep the feedback coming.

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Critical Resistance Mission Statement

Critical Resistance seeks to build an international movement to end the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC). We do this by challenging the belief that caging and controlling people makes us safe. We believe that basic necessities such as food, shelter, and freedom are what really make our communities secure. As such, our work is part of global struggles against inequality and powerlessness. The success of the movement requires that it reflect communities most affected by the PIC. Because we seek to abolish the PIC, we cannot support any work that extends its life or scope.

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Connection Sheets

It's important for abolitionists to be able to talk about the world we want to build. But it's just as important for us to be able to explain why we're opposed to the violence of the world shaped by the PIC.

THESE CONNECTION SHEETS ARE MEANT TO:

ILLUSTRATE SOME OF THE WAYS THAT THE PIC AFFECTS DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES.

Each sheet is meant to be a tool that you can use to bring an analysis of the PIC into other work you may be doing (around homelessness, or immigration, or queer issues, for instance).

SHOW THAT ABOLISHING THE PIC DOESN'T JUST MEAN WORKING ON PRISON ISSUES.

In fact, it's key that we see how abolition is an important strategy for all social justice work. The PIC is one of the main barriers that stand in the way of creating genuinely safe, lasting communities.

SHOW HOW ABOLITION DOESN'T JUST MEAN SPENDING LESS ON PRISONS AND POLICE AND MORE ON SCHOOLS AND HOUSING.

As they exist right now, institutions like schools and public housing are part of the PIC. We need to weaken their ability to prop up the PIC. As abolitionists, we don't just want better-funded schools (although that might be an important step). We also demand the power to shape the programs and institutions in our communities.

FIT TOGETHER WITH THE KEYWORDS SECTION.

Often, defining terms (and learning how the state defines them) is as important as statistics are in understanding a problem. (You can find the keywords section at the end of the toolkit).

BE JUST A FIRST GUIDE TO SOME OF THE PIECES OF THE PIC. THE RESOURCES LISTED AT THE END OF EACH CONNECTION SHEET HAVE MORE DETAILED ANALYSES OF EACH ISSUE.

Prisons

In the 1980s, the United States launched the biggest prison building spree in the history of the world. More and more people are caged every single year. Native people, people of color, and the poor face the highest risks of being locked up. Fiddling with how prisons are run isn't going to change this basic fact: they're based on racism and repression. As abolitionists, we need to create solutions that guarantee communities' safety and self-determination. Prisons stand in the way of these basic goals.

- There are over 2 million people in cages in the US—about 1,361,000 people in state and federal prisons, and 665,475 people in local jails (as of December 31, 2002).
- 6.6 million people in the US are either locked up, or on parole or probation.
- The US imprisons more of its residents than any other country.

Because of the way the federal government keeps numbers on racial groups, it's hard to give statistics for many groups. Asian Americans, Native Americans, Alaskan Natives, Hawaiian Natives, and other Pacific Islanders are all lumped together as "other." Here is some of what we do know:

- In 1997, about 1% of Native Americans (16,000 in all) were in local jails. This is a higher percentage than any other racial group.
- In 1997, 63,000 Native Americans, or 4% of the entire Native American population, were either locked up, or on parole or probation.
- In 1994, 75 of the 124 federal prisoners under 18 were Native American.
- Since 1980, the percentage of Asian-Americans in federal prison has quadrupled.
- Black men have at least a 28.5% likelihood of being caged during their lifetimes. (Today, this number might even be higher, since the 28.5% figure was based on lower, 1991 imprisonment rates.)
- While Blacks represent only about 13% of drug users, Black people represent 38% of those arrested for drug offenses, 55% of those convicted of drug offenses, and 74% of those sent to prison.
- In 2000, 29% of Black males under 40 who had not completed high school were in prison.
- While only 7% of prisoners are women, the women's prison population has grown 600% since 1980, and it continues to rise.
- Black females are 8 times more likely, and Latina females are 4 times more likely, to be imprisoned than white females.
- 36% of people in jail in 1996 were unemployed before being captured. Another 28% had monthly incomes of under $1000.
- In 2003, 2.2 million people were employed in policing, prisons, and the courts. States keep hiring more of these people, and not teachers or social workers.

INFORMATION COMPILED FROM / FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Bureau of Justice Statistics: http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs
The Sentencing Project: http://www.sentencingproject.org/pubs_02.cfm
Deep Impact: Quantifying the Effect of Prison Expansion in the South, Justice Policy Institute, 2003: http://www.riseup.net/jpi/downloads/deepimpactfinal.pdf
Punishment and Prejudice: Racial Disparities in the War on Drugs, Human Rights Watch, 2000

Homelessness and the PIC

There are many things that threaten the safety of the homeless. Not having a reliable place to live creates many of those problems. Without a place to rest or keep clean, it's hard to meet the basic expectations for holding a job. Homeless people are forced to sleep, cook, use the bathroom, and store possessions in public. Homeless people are left open to having these activities criminalized. More and more, our society uses police, prisons, and courts to punish the homeless. People's basic needs, and the causes of homelessness, all go ignored. Advocates for the homeless can work toward abolition by seeing the PIC as getting in the way of people's safety and basic needs.

- Housing costs are way too high for many people, including the working poor. Minimum wage income is not enough to cover fair market rent in any city or county in the US. (See the "Rental Housing" report).
- A study found that out of 57 cities surveyed, not a single one had enough shelter beds for all of the homeless.
- Not having a mailing address makes it hard to register to vote, receive government benefits, or apply for a job.
- Homeless people are punished for non-harmful activities like loitering. These "quality of life" laws are mostly enforced against homeless people. Tourists drinking in public, or napping on a blanket in a park probably wouldn't be arrested. But a homeless person sleeping on a piece of cardboard probably would be.
- In one year, 43,000 people were cited for breaking "quality of life" laws in San Francisco. People who are cited usually have to pay a fine. If they can't pay the fine, they are put in jail.
- Homeless people in Baltimore, for example, spend an average of 35 days per year in jail.
- Because some homeless people end up having criminal records, they have an even harder time finding housing and jobs.

INFORMATION COMPILED FROM / FOR MORE INFORMATION:

"Illegal to Be Homeless, The Criminalization of Homelessness in the United States," National Coalition for the Homeless and the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty:
http://www.nationalhomeless.org/crimreport/index.html
"Rental Housing for America's Poor Families: Farther Out of Reach than Ever, 2002," National Low Income Housing Coalition: http://www.nlihc.org/oor2002/index.htm

Queer People and the PIC

Queer people face higher surveillance and repression based on their actions and appearances. Some queer people are not safe at home and end up spending more of their time on the street, which can mean facing the threat of police harassment every day. For queer people who are locked up, their identities are abused and denied. All of the gender "cages" in our society, mixed with surveillance, policing, and imprisonment, put queer people at risk of violence. The risks are even higher for queer youth, queers of color, queer sex workers, transgendered people, low-income queers, and other marginalized queers. Abolition would mean putting an end to tracking people's bodies and behavior based on gender and sexuality.

- Many queer youth are denied a caring home because of their sexuality. They are put in foster care homes that are hostile, where they often experience violence. Or they are forced onto the streets.
- 100% of queer youth in group homes have experienced heterosexist verbal abuse in their foster care. 70% have experience physical violence there.
- 35-50% of homeless youth are queer.
- "Quality of life" laws also target queer youth. They are fined or jailed just for being outside.
- Policing and surveillance often target public displays of affection by queers. Cops often read transgendered people as sex workers.
- 49% of attacks on transgendered people in San Francisco are committed by police.
- Prisoners are forced into living conditions segregated "male" and "female."
- A prisoner who doesn't identify with either of those gender labels, or who identifies with a gender that guards and police don't agree "match" the prisoner's genitals, is often forced into solitary confinement or a cell with people of different genders. However prisoners are classified, it's not based on their choice, or with concern for their safety.
- People using hormones are often denied access, or regular access, to hormones in prison.
- Queer people in prison are at high risk of verbal and physical abuse, from guards and other prisoners.

INFORMATION COMPILED FROM / FOR MORE INFORMATION:

"justice for all?" a report from the Lesbian and Gay Youth Project of the Urban Justice Center:
http://www.urbanjustice.org/publications/pdfs/lesbianandgay/justiceforallreport.pdf.

FIERCE! factsheets: Contact, 646.336.6789 x108, fierceyouthnyc@aol.com

Health Care and the PIC

The PIC gets in the way of people meeting their basic needs. It does not provide health care, healthy food, shelter, or what makes people safer and healthier. Some of the main reasons that people don't have healthcare are the very same factors that put people at risk of being locked up. Un(der)employment, homelessness, and immigration laws are at the heart of real threats to safety. By not using punishment as a response to human insecurity, we can begin truly to prioritize basic needs like health care.

- More than 40 million people in the United States have no health insurance.
- 34.8% of Latinos and 20.1% of Blacks lack health insurance, compared to 11.1% of whites.
- Insurance doesn't always guarantee perfect healthcare. But people without insurance suffer from much higher rates of diseases such as cancers, heart disease, arthritis, and mental illness. These are all conditions that can be managed with early identification and consistent treatment.
- The health of homeless people is especially vulnerable. 61% of homeless children in New York City have not received complete vaccinations (vs. 85% of housed children). Homeless people experience frostbite, leg ulcers, and respiratory illnesses because of their lack of consistent housing.
- Only about 10% of people in need of drug treatment receive the services they need. More and more, the only way to get any kind of drug treatment is through the courts.

Prisoners face huge restrictions to getting the most basic health care.

- Prisoners have to jump over hurdles just to see a doctor. Even when they get an appointment, they have trouble getting good care, or the right medicine.
- Prison guards sometimes keep prisoners' medicines from them. Other times, they don't give it out on the right schedule (with food, or on an empty stomach). This is especially a problem for prisoners in control units, or during lock downs.
- Increasingly, prisoners are forced to pay to see a doctor even when they have little or no income.
- In 2000, California women prisoners testified about how their health was endangered. Prisoners were never notified about diseases that they tested positive for. They were denied treatment for deadly cancers. At least two women died from being given medicine for diseases that they didn't have.
- Prisoners are also in danger of sexual abuse from doctors.

INFORMATION COMPILED FROM / FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Cover the Uninsured Week Information: http://www.covertheuninsured.org

National Coalition for the Homeless: http://www.nationalhomeless.org

Understanding Prison Health Care: http://www.movementbuilding.org/prisonhealth/

The HIV/HCV in Prison Committee of California Prison Focus:
http://www.prisons.org/hivin.htm

Mental Health and the PIC

Mental illness is often seen as separate from other health issues. There are some reasons why it's worthwhile to look particularly at mental illness and the PIC. But it's important to remember that mental health problems are often a sign that people's other health needs aren't being met.

Dealing with mental illness means thinking about the increased support that some people in our communities need. It may be as irresponsible to let some people "fend for themselves" as it is to lock them up. But it's also often as cruel to put them in hospitals as in prisons. As abolitionists, we need to create new options. Locally-based programs should offer pesonalized support to people, without punishing them for their illness. Care should be based on individualized solutions, not high levels of medication and restrictions.

Some facts:

- About 283,000 prisoners report suffering from some form of mental illness (about 14% of the prisoner population). The actual number of prisoners with mental health problems is probably much higher.
- The Los Angeles County Jail has ended up being the biggest mental health facility in the US: on a given night, at least 3,300 mentally ill people are locked up there.

These statistics expose at least two problems:

- Mental illness (and the way that our communities respond to it) makes it more likely that people will come into contact with the PIC in the first place. Mental illness makes it harder to hold a job, and it can lead to rejection by family and friends. One common result, unfortunately, is homelessness. When homeless, or even just walking down the street, mentally ill people are at risk of surveillance for "quality of life crimes" like being a "nuisance," or loitering.
- Prison makes mental illness worse. Prisoners face stress from physical and emotional abuse. And they lose the treatment and support networks they may have once had.

One common suggestion is that people with mental illness don't belong in prisons or on the streets, but in mental hospitals. The idea is that these hospitals are good places to receive treatment.

Huge numbers of mental hospitals have been closed since the 1960s. This means that many fewer mentally ill people are in state hospitals (from 559,000 in 1955, to 70,000 in 2001). This shift is typically called "de-institutionalization." But we need to be aware of how other institutions, like policing and prisons, became substitute "solutions" to mental illness. Mental hospitals and prisons aren't the same, but many of their practices are:

- Both state hospitals and prisons punish by denying freedom of movement.
- Both rely on physically isolating people. They don't use individualized problem solving, or emotionally safe and personalized counseling.

CONTINUED

INFORMATION COMPILED FROM / FOR MORE INFORMATION:

The Sentencing Project, Mentally Ill Offenders in the Criminal Justice System: An Analysis and Prescription

"The Mental Health Crisis Behind Bars," Terry Kupers, The Harvard Mental Health Letter, 7/2000.

Schools and the PIC

We are tracking one group of kids from kindergarten to prison, and we are tracking one group of kids from kindergarten to college. -Lani Guinier

"Schools not Jails" and "Education not Incarceration" are two popular anti-prison slogans. But we need to do much more work before schools are true alternatives to the PIC. If we just took all of the money out of the prison budgets and put it into the schools we have now, our job as abolitionists wouldn't be done.

In order to see this, let's turn another popular saying on its head. People often talk about how public schools are "failing." It's true that most schools are failing to educate and empower young people. But they are succeeding in another way. They punish and discipline young people and push them into state institutions.

As abolitionists, we need to prevent schools from supporting maintaining the PIC.

Discipline policies push young people out of school. These harsh rules don't empower people or keep them safe.

- More and more, schools seem like prisons and jails. There are cops on campus, metal detectors in the hallways, and "zero-tolerance" policies for fighting and drugs.
- These punishing responses target students of color. The more students of color there are in a school, the more likely the school is to have police officers in the building, use random metal detector testing, and randomly search students' possessions
- Teachers and principals are more likely to suspend students of color than white students. The same goes for kicking students out of the classroom.
- Discipline policies in schools push young people into prison. Students who are suspended are more likely to drop out of school. States with higher rates of suspension also have higher rates of juvenile imprisonment.

(See "School to Prison Pipeline" website listed below for these statistics.)

High school exit exams also drive students out of the classroom. These tests don't build better schools. They just label some students "failures."

- Many districts require students to pass a test to get a diploma. In 2013, these tests will be mandatory everywhere in the US.
- Testing pulls money away from books, and school programs. Teachers are forced to teach how to take a test, instead of real skills.
- Testing causes students of color to suffer for the failures of the educational system. It makes it look like middle-class, rich, and white students' succeed because of their "virtues." It hides the racism and class prejudice that gives some schools more resources.
- In 2002 68% of California students failed the math section, and 46% failed the English section. The failure rates were higher in schools with mostly students of color.

CONTINUED →

•Exit exams push students of color into poverty and prison. Out of all Black people who work full-time and without a high school diploma, only 6.8% earn wages above the poverty line. People without high school diplomas are also more likely to be imprisoned.
• Many young people face physical and sexual abuse. Survivors of abuse are much more likely to be suspended, expelled, and also imprisoned. School officials rarely know how to provide support.
•Under the "No Child Left Behind Act," all high schools have to give a list of students to the military. The military uses this list to recruit students, especially those who don't graduate.

INFORMATION COMPILED FROM / FOR MORE INFORMATION:

The Applied Research Center ERASE Initiative, "Profiled & Punished" &
"Racial Profiling and Punishment in US Public Schools", http://www.arc.org/erase/downloads/profiling.pdf
School to Prison Pipeline Conference, Draft Papers,
http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/pipeline03/call_resegpapers.php

Militarization

The term "militarization" describes becoming like the military, or using military equipment or strategies. Militarization also means links between the military and local agencies, like police. The military teaches these agencies how to "solve problems" by capturing people and using force. In the past 20 years, the military and the police have worked much more closely together than ever before. Abolitionists can challenge the idea that using military ideas and equipment builds safe communities.

- In 1997 alone, the Department of Defense gave 1.2 million pieces of military equipment to police departments. This equipment included assault rifles, grenade launchers, and armored personnel carriers.
- The military has directly trained more than 30,000 police units.
- This military-police cooperation has been deadly. Between 1995 and 1998, there was a 34% increase in police "use of deadly force" (murders by police).
- In 2002, the US Army lent five RC-7 surveillance planes to local police.

One place that militarization is clearest is the Mexico-US border. Military, police, and border agents use massive, deadly force against people who enter the US.

- Joint Task Force-6 (JTF-6) is a federal program that gives military equipment to local police near the Mexican-US border. The police receive explosives, air surveillance equipment, money, and "intelligence" information.
- In the 1990s, "Operation Gatekeeper" built ten-foot steel walls along parts of the border. These walls have forced people to cross the border in desert areas. Thousands of people die from dehydration and heat exposure trying to cross the border every year.
- The US Border Patrol at the Mexico border has more armed officers than the entire FBI.
- High-intensity stadium lights are turned on along the border every night. This is the same equipment that prisons use. The lights strongly disrupt the ecosystem.

The US spreads its militaristic ideas to other countries.

- Most of the "foreign aid" that the US gives to other countries is in the form of weapons. Countries like Israel, Colombia, the Philippines, and Indonesia use these weapons against people in their own country.
- The US has military forces in 156 of the 192 countries in the world.

INFORMATION COMPILED FROM / FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Border Action Network web materials, http://www.borderaction.org
National Lawyers Guild Military Law Task Force, http://www.nlg.org/mltf/
War Times Sept. 2002, http://www.war-times.org/backissues/5art6.html

Public Benefits and Voting

Programs like public housing, food stamps, and welfare are meant to meet people's basic needs. But people who depend on these programs are observed and investigated in ways that jeopardize their safety. People are often thrown off of these programs, despite their ability to survive. These restrictions often continue to punish former prisoners for life.

Keeping people off of the social safety net doesn't heal harm. It doesn't bring families together, or help people be part of the life of their communities. We need to end restrictions that leave people at risk. Abolitionists can create lasting ways to provide people's basic needs.

People who live in public housing face surveillance and harsh restrictions. The state punishes people by leaving them homeless, instead of providing support or resources.

- Families are punished by "one-strike" rules. If residents or their family or guests break certain rules, they can lose their housing. One example: In 1998, Oakland evicted several elderly people, just because their relatives had been accused of carrying drugs near the housing development.
- New York City has installed over 1000 surveillance cameras in five public housing projects, without consulting residents.
- The Oakland Housing Authority requires residents to submit to "regular home visits for the purpose of evaluating housekeeping habits, social behavior, family practices, parenting and organizational skills." This kind of rule is common under the most recent federal law about public housing (called Hope VI).
- The federal government has built almost no public housing since the mid 1980s.

Welfare

- In some states, under federal law, no one with a drug felony record can ever receive welfare or food stamps. Between 1996 and 1999, more than 92,000 women were affected by the lifetime welfare ban. 48% of these women were African-American or Latina.
- Between 1995 and 2000, Alameda County, California, arrested more than 5000 public assistance recipients for making mistakes when filling out confusing paperwork. These people ended up receiving checks that were larger than they were "entitled" to. The County punishes families for mistakes in its mailing and computer system.

Voting

- 46 states have some kind of restrictions that prevent prisoners or former prisoners from voting. These laws rob people of an important tool to raise their voices against the PIC.
- Because of felony voting laws, 13.1% of Black men have temporarily or permanently lost their rights to vote. In 16 states, more than 10% of Black men have permanently lost their rights to vote.

INFORMATION COMPILED FROM/ FOR MORE INFORMATION:

http://www.hrw.org/reports98/vote/
http://www.drugpolicy.org/library/factsheets/barriers/
Aaron Shuman, "How to Read a Housing Crisis." Bad Subjects, Issue 47, 2000,
http://eserver.org/bs/47/shuman.html
http://www.gothamgazette.com/iotw/surveillance/
http://www.foodfirst.org/progs/humanrts/corpwel.html

Environmental Racism

Environmental racism can mean not enforcing environmental laws, when people of color are the ones mostly harmed. It can also mean choosing to build toxic waste disposal sites only in communities of color. Communities of color and poor communities suffer an unfair number of environmentally destructive land uses-- land uses that take from the community but don't give back to it.

Prisons don't only harm the communities where prisoners come from. Prisons are also environmental and social disasters for the towns where prisons are built. Part of abolishing the PIC also means building communities that have the power to decide how their resources are best used.

Many US states build most prisons where the poor and people of color live.

- •Communities are often shut out of the process of deciding whether a prison should be built in their town.
- •In Mendota California, the Federal Bureau of Prisons refused to translate its 1000 page environmental impact report into Spanish. 86% of Mendota residents are native Spanish speakers.

It's important that we understand why prisons make bad neighbors. It's not because of the people who are locked inside. It's not because of the prisoners' family members (who rarely move to the prison town anyway). It's because prison buildings themselves are environmental hazards.

- •Prisons use up scarce water resources and create huge amounts of sewage waste.
- •To dispose of waste products, boilers in prisons can burn coal and diesel. These release the same chemicals as hazardous waste incinerators.
- •Prison guards usually commute to the prison from dozens of miles away. This creates huge amounts of air pollution. This is one of the reasons why the San Joaquin Valley in California (which has several prisons) surpassed Los Angeles as having the second worst air in the country.
- •Prisons use up land that was once used to grow food. This valuable land no longer creates jobs or public resources.

INFORMATION COMPILED FROM / FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Critical Resistance and California Prison Moratorium Project, "New Forms of Environmental Racism" Pamphlet Available from CR, and at http://www.criticalresistance.org/index.php?name=environmental_racism

Immigration

Immigration policies are based on force, punishment, and racism. They don't take into account the real social and economic needs of people who enter, live, and work in the US. People are punished and locked up just for trying to live in the same country as their family members, to find a better-paying job, or to escape from political, race, gender, or heterosexist discrimination in another country. Military and police make it more dangerous than ever for people to move across national borders.

People without US citizenship face everyday surveillance and harassment by police. Undocumented immigrants are also harassed by agencies that should provide services.

- In Fresno, California in 2003, police set up roadblocks to check citizenship documents of suspected undocumented immigrants.
- Under the 1996 federal immigration law, employees of local governments and social service agencies are permitted to give the federal government information about people's immigration status.

People without US citizenship can be deported if they are convicted of most kinds of crimes, including drug crimes, property crimes, or offenses related to "national security" or "moral turpitude" (immorality). Non-citizens usually are sent to US prisons, and then the federal government seeks to deport them.

- The "moral turpitude" rule was used against undocumented workers in 2002. Airport screeners who were accused of forging ID in order to keep their jobs were deported.
- Undocumented US residents who were convicted of breaking immigration law spent an average of 3.6 months in prison in 1985. By 2000, the average had gone up to 20.6 months.
- The Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (BICE) (formerly the INS) decides whom to deport based on a long list of rules. The longer the prison sentence, the more likely a person will be deported. Because prison sentences in the US are getting longer and longer, more and more people are being deported.
- Noncitizens can be prevented from entering the US, based on suspicion of being, or ever having been, a drug trafficker. Immigration agents don't need any proof to keep someone out of the US through this rule. This means that immigration agents can target immigrants through stereotypes based on national origin, race, and physical appearance.
- Under the 2001 "USA PATRIOT Act", immigrants and non-citizens can be detained indefinitely, for "national security" reasons. The government does not have to hold any kind of hearing or trial, ever.

INFORMATION COMPILED FROM / FOR MORE INFORMATION:

National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild, http://www.nationalimmigrationproject.org
Bureau of Justice Statistics, http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs
Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, http://www.bice.immigration.gov/graphics/index.htm
"How the anti-terrorism bill permits indefinite detention of immigrants who are not terrorists" flyer, available from Critical Resistance.

Policing

The police include city police, sheriffs, highway patrols, border agents, DEA agents, and Federal Marshalls. While some instances of police brutality are well known (think Rodney King, Amadou Diallo), policing itself is brutality. Police pay attention to the interests of certain people (wealthy/white people and their property) but endanger and ignore the needs of people of color and poor and working people.

Police use force—arrest or threat of arrest and physical harm—to make people act in certain ways and be in certain places. They enforce the laws that shape what we think crime is. Police also create and reinforce social norms that aren't laws, like where people of different races and genders should be, or how they should behave.

Police inflict harm and remove people from their communities to deal with social problems. These tactics mark abuse and create new problems. To abolish the PIC, we need to stop allowing people with badges to force other people into cages. To be safe, we need to replace arrest with more lasting problem-solving techniques. (For more on this, see the FAQs section, which deals with ways we can build safety without the PIC).

The strategies and weapons that police use are abusive (also see the militarization information sheet):

- Police conduct "no-knock raids," where they draw their guns, storm people's homes, and explode flash-bang grenades. There have been hundreds of cases where police exploded these grenades in homes of people they weren't even looking for. Philadelphia police, for example, break into the wrong house about once a week.
- Police "stop and frisk" people on the street, based on who they think looks to be carrying a gun. Frisking is a way of intimidating people and making communities feel like they're totally controlled by the police. New York City police don't arrest 80% of the people that they frisk. (also see racial profiling below)
- Police use pepper sprays, 50,000 volt stun guns, rubber bullets aimed at the chest or abdomen, and "blunt trauma" weapons such as batons. These are meant to be "less-than-lethal alternatives" to guns. But the result is even larger numbers of deadly weapons. In 2003, an asthmatic man in Fort Lauderdale became the 90th person since 1990 whose death was partly caused by being pepper sprayed by police. More than 3000 police departments in the US use pepper spray.
- Police often use stun guns to temporarily paralyze and arrest homeless people and people with mental illness. Police can strike people with stun guns from 21 feet away.

Native people in the US have always been targeted by military and police forces. There are numerous reports of police harassing native people with beatings and mass arrests, sometimes during nonviolent protests.

CONTINUED

RACIAL PROFILING IS WHEN POLICE TARGET PEOPLE FOR SEARCH OR ARREST BASED ON THEIR RACIAL APPEARANCE. Sometimes police are officially told to use racial profiling, and sometimes they choose to use it. Either way, racial profiling is a white supremacist harm: police violence focused against people of color. Because of profiling, people of color are the ones who most often get searched and arrested. This remakes the stereotype that people of color are criminals:

- In 1995, 76% of drivers stopped on I-95 by Maryland police were black. Only 20% of Marylanders with drivers licenses are black.
- A New Jersey State Police training manual instructs troopers to look out for "Colombian males, Hispanic males, Hispanic and a black male together, Hispanic male and female posing as a couple" to find so-called drug traffickers.
- The Justice Department allows profiling of men who look “Middle Eastern” or “Muslim,” for “national security” reasons in the “War on Terror.”

CIVILIAN REVIEW BOARDS ARE SUPPOSED TO BE PLACES WHERE PEOPLE CAN MAKE COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE POLICE. A review board can make a judgment against a particular cop for a particular abuse. But review boards don’t have power to say that the police shouldn’t exist or aren’t effective in the first place. While these boards might be used to fight certain police abuses, there are major limitations to the way they currently function:

- Police intimidate the survivors of brutality not to file complaints. Police have charged people with “disorderly conduct” and “assault,” just to make them drop complaints. In Seattle in 1994, police sued people who had filed complaints. The next year, 75% fewer complaints were filed.
- Review Boards are part of the government. Their members are usually chosen by the city government and police department. Boards have narrow definitions of what counts as abuse or brutality. If we only rely on boards the way they exist now, we are only able to address isolated cases of state harm, instead of focusing on all the ways the PIC creates harm.
- Review boards are for punishment. Boards can’t change the procedures and rules that police follow. It’s hard to think that cops who do terrible harm shouldn’t be punished or imprisoned. But to build a world beyond the PIC, we need to find ways to deal with individuals (like police officers and guards) who commit state harm that don’t rely on punishment and cages.

INFORMATION COMPILED FROM / FOR MORE INFORMATION:

http://www.rightsforall-usa.org/info/report/index.htm
http://web.amnesty.org/report2003/Usa-summary-eng
http://www.villagevoice.com/issues/0325/little.php
http://www.villagevoice.com/issues/9913/hentoff.php
Reason Magazine, August-September 2001
“Errant raids by police bring terror home,” Philadelphia Inquirer, October 18, 1992.

Why Do We Do This? How Do We Do This?

Not all abolitionists have the same political goals. We disagree about what exactly we are abolishing, why that is necessary, how to do it, and what abolition will look like. Alliances across these differences are a critical part of creating a movement, so we need to address those differences to make them strengths instead of weaknesses in our work. Here are some ideas to help organize a discussion about why you are coming together to work for abolition and about how that shapes what you think abolition is and how to fight for it.

THERE ARE LOTS OF DIFFERENT WAYS TO APPROACH ABOLITION.

You might come to abolition because you think:

putting people in cages is immoral

abolition can be a strategy to disrupt and eventually undo the state

abolition is central to challenging white supremacy

abolition is a challenge to the economic harm of the PIC

No matter what your approach or political leanings, one thing should stand out: if we're imagining that a world without prisons is going to look like the world we live in now, we aren't really imagining abolition.

|Discussion Questions|

- Why are you doing/wanting to do abolitionist work? Or why aren't you? What are your hesitations (whether you are or aren't)?
- What types of work does an abolitionist perspective make easier/harder?
- How does being or not being an abolitionist connect to your political identity?

- Is abolition an end to itself?
- A strategy for or part of a larger political view?
- A tool to shape your political worldview?

|What Do You See?|

It's easy to see how fighting the PIC is fighting to tear down cages. And if abolition is about getting rid of all the cages, part of the problem is figuring out where they all are. Different approaches to abolition make different cages easier and/or harder to see. A cage isn't only four concrete walls; cages are all the things that restrict self-control and make someone exposed to harm. Cages work physically, emotionally, and structurally (meaning they have to do with patterns of how we live, not someone's personal politics or feelings). We believe that if you can't get rid of all the cages, you haven't abolished the PIC. We also believe that if you don't get rid of all the cages, the ones left standing will create new ones. If we only tear down the concrete cages but not the structural cages like white supremacy, heterosexism and imperialism, the PIC will reappear in new forms.

There isn't a set of rules for what politics people must share to be allies in abolition. But starting from certain sets of interests places certain limits to the ways you fight for abolition, and shapes how broad you think that fight is. The more we understand the different places we're coming from, the faster we can find ways to get to where we want to be. Here are some thoughts about different approaches to abolition:

|Moral Approach|

A moral framework about what is "right" and "wrong" is a powerful starting place for organizing—and one that we're all using in some way or another. Moral frameworks can be used in positive and negative ways.

For example, queer people are often told they are not moral; colonization is often justified as bringing morality to the colonized, and so on. These moral frameworks, in positioning themselves as objective and absolute, become tools of discipline and harm themselves. This makes organizing abolition only around morality a problem--but not irrelevant--to many of the overlapping communities most harmed by the PIC. Faith communities, for example, have often been able to organize huge numbers of people using moral arguments.

A moral framework can offer a clear answer for why we need to do away with all the types of cages: they are absolutely wrong, so we can't use them at all. But we need more reasons and tools for fighting the PIC, which do not come just from a breakdown in morals. Sometimes when we only talk about the immorality of putting a human being in a cage, it makes it harder to understand the violent connections in these systems. The challenge is to use moral language in a way that makes the connections between the PIC, systems of state violence, and clear ways to challenge that violence, rather than flattening the PIC into simple rights and wrongs.

|Political Approach|

To do this, we need a political approach to the PIC that responds to all the ways power works in this system. This means thinking about how power is distributed between people and institutions (violently, democratically, through consensus) and about how those people and institutions were defined in the first place. How did we come to believe in race and gender as real things? How did prisons get defined as places of punishment and schools as places of education? How come most people think that capitalism means freedom to choose?

Thinking politically also means thinking about harm. It means asking: how are the life chances and health of certain individuals, communities, groups, and regions affected by the PIC? This is a view of abolition grounded in understanding how power is shared (or not), what the effects of power systems are, and analyzing how those systems came to be. This means looking at who is hurt by the PIC and who (in the short-term) gains. It's complicated because both lists are going to be long and overlapping, especially because while in the short-term some people definitely gain from the PIC, in the long run we are all on the "hurt" side. This work requires and produces historical questions and connections like the following three:

1. What other power systems does the PIC remind you of?

This can be general or specific. Some ideas are: slavery, the New Deal, the Middle Passage, warfare, the health care system, or "homeland security." How do these connections help you to explain the problem better, or help people to see why they should care about abolition? How is the PIC today related to these other power systems?

EXAMPLE What are the connections between the PIC and the New Deal? The New Deal was a package of laws created to get the United States out of the Great Depression. It included many public works programs, Social Security, and one of the first national welfare programs. Both are ways of maintaining inequality. The PIC obviously maintains inequality by putting particular groups of people either directly in cages or generally subjecting them to intense repression. And even though it is more commonly remembered for providing relief, the New Deal also maintained inequality. Its purpose was to prevent the collapse of capitalism in the United States. It did provide jobs and protections for some people who needed it, but did so to prevent more radical social change—the thinking was that it's easier to guarantee people's minimum welfare than to risk them rebelling. Also, the New Deal kept up racial and gendered inequality by saving almost all its relief for unemployed white men—it did not undo, and in fact reinforced, the exclusion of white women, men of color, and particularly women of color from secure, well-paying positions in the workforce.

2. What power systems produced the PIC?

These are often more nuts-n-bolts questions:

- What organization, politician, or interest group set off a prison-building boom in your state?
- How did those groups get so powerful?
- When was it that being "tough on crime" became so important?
- Was there ever even a crime boom?
- How are these particular events connected to larger systems like white supremacy?
- Why did they happen when they did, and not some other way?

Sentence Exercise

Choose one (or more) institutions to compare to the PIC. Decide on a set number of points of comparison. They might be:

- historical era and geographic location
- economic, gender, and racial systems in place
- environmental effects
- political justifications that keep these systems alive
- ways the state maintains these systems

For each point of comparison, try to come up with one sentence along the lines of:

"Just like _____, the PIC..."

EXAMPLE: "Just like Homeland Security, the PIC claims to be about safety and order even though it really makes the lives of most people—especially people of color--less safe and more disordered."

Don't worry about making your sentences including EVERY point of comparison. Make as many as you want, and try to emphasize the connections that will be most motivating or illuminating. You can also run this exercise the opposite way: what are the dissimilarities? These answers will also tell you about who shaped the particulars of the PIC, which may or may not be the same as who you think is benefiting from it.

3. What have some of the effects of PIC reform and/or PIC abolition campaigns been?

Many times, prison reform has made the PIC stronger. Whether on purpose or not, what are some examples of reforms related to your work? How can this type of reform be exposed and avoided in the future? This not only gives you direct comparison for the work you're doing now, but can give a sense of how the PIC responds to challenges (see Abolitionist Steps for more on this).

This viewpoint focuses less on individuals and their actions or intentions and more on how power works through established paths, areas, and systems. This perspective lends itself toward putting white supremacy, heterosexism, and class prejudice in the center of your work, rather than focusing on the actions of individuals. This shift can be as straightforward

as targeting a department of corrections instead than a particular administrator or politician. It can also be long-range, like doing broad political education about white supremacy instead of a campaign against a particular prison or policy.

EXAMPLE In the 1970s, many prisoner activists and their supporters fought for the end to indeterminate sentencing. Sentences like "1 year to life" gave prison administrators and parole boards almost total control over when to release people. Court-ordered determinate sentencing plans were a major reform at the time, especially for sidestepping the racism that kept prisoners of color from ever being released—no matter their conviction or behavior while inside. However, determinate sentencing paved the way for mandatory sentencing and the kinds of zero tolerance and Three Strikes laws that now have much the same effect as indeterminate sentencing: people never get to go home.

|Visionary Approach|

Working through these political connections helps us to imagine the United States (or the world) without prisons, police, surveillance, or even punishment. When we do that, chances are there are more changes than simply sending people home. Some changes to think about are:

- What will happen to the politicians, bureaucrats, workers, and corporations who make their living off the PIC in one way or another?
- Will political activists be free from state repression?
- What will borders look like?
- What will happen to institutions (and the resources that currently go into them) like the military and police?
- What will happen to social service programs?
- How will we recognize ourselves (and others) in racial, sexual, and gendered terms if we don't have ways to punishing those who don't fit in?
- How will we meet the needs of people suffering harm?

Only by organizing for abolition can we fill out our vision of what it's going to look like. Abolition is about undoing our dependence on punishment and violence to watch over and judge individual behavior and social structures to create a new society. Figuring out new systems to organize our lives is part of what abolition is about. To do that, we have to embrace the fact that abolition is going to mean some changes we can't imagine yet, ones that affect nearly every part of our lives. Again, when we imagine what abolition will make our world look like, it shouldn't seem like the world we live in now.

|Questions for Discussion|

The work of abolition is figuring out how to fight cages right now without settling for any short-term "victory" that might make the system any stronger in the long run.

Which of these models and their combinations helps you find the most cages?

What cages are most important to your work? What connections with other cages do you see? What are the ones that don't get talked about enough?

Exercise

Analyze a campaign. One person or group might describe a campaign that they're working on or have completed. Briefly share an outline of what happened or is happening, then ask questions like:

- What cages were seen as the major problem in this campaign?

•What understandings of the political system did this campaign try to use and spread?
•What we some of the shortcomings? Who/What got excluded or downplayed?
•How could it be done better? What are ways to more clearly tie this particular effort to a broad-based abolitionist movement?

Picture Exercise

On a large piece of butcher paper, draw the cages of the PIC.

What connects them?

For this exercise, fewer instructions might help produce the broadest range of representations.

I think that history shows us that it's important to carry out work along abolitionist lines. I think that history shows us that reforms have temporarily made things better at some points, and some reforms have been incredibly important in improving conditions inside prisons or giving basic rights to prisoners...but if we don't approach that work with a critical eye to what it is that we're creating in its place, and if we're not doing the work in a way that actually undermines the power structure, then that's where we have a problem, because if we're not questioning the underlying—not just causes and reasons for why people become incarcerated but the underlying causes and reasons that give others a vested interest in seeing more and more people being locked up, then we're not addressing the problem. We're simply putting band-aids on some underlying issues of inequality and power in our society... If we don't attack the systemic structures and institutions and power structures that lead to the problem in the first place, then rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic, as people say, isn't ultimately going to get us where we all say we want to be.

Melissa Burch

| Talk of "Crime" |

Talk of crime usually plays a key role in giving an explanation for the current punishment system. In addition, whether it is in the corporate media, the state government, or everyday discussions, talk of crime is often full of race and class prejudice. Often, it focuses just on poor urban neighborhoods of color. By contrast, government rules and actions are rarely described as crime.

Discussions of crime often take place without discussion about system-wide forms of oppression such as racism, capitalism, ableism, heterosexism, and sexism. As a result, talk of crime happens without the critical thinking needed to properly understand the conditions in which many acts of harm do take place in our society. How can we understand murder, theft, sexual abuse, police brutality, or any crime without understanding the social forces and economic conditions surrounding them?

Despite the controlling and warped ways that crime is often discussed, we can't just stop talking about crime. Few people will take us seriously if we avoid or sell-short a discussion of crime. In order to have successful discussions of crime, we need to deal with some questions.

- How can we undo the harmful myths and ideas that often surround talk of crime?
- How is crime defined and what are other ways we could define it?
- How should we critically understand the harm that does take place in our society?

In the end, we want to participate in discussions of crime in a way that draws out the people's abilities to reason effectively and not fall into oppressive ideas or mind-numbing fears caused by hysteria over crime.

Exercise: Discussing Crime

One way to undo harmful myths and ideas is to critically assess media portrayals of crime.

Consider the following study:

Many years ago sociologist Mark Fishman did a study that is still meaningful to today. Fishman looked at how the media created fictional "crime waves" with racially coded images. In a time when there was no evidence of an increase in violence against elderly New Yorkers, Fishman found that the three main newspapers of the city along with five local TV stations reported an upswing of violence targeting the elderly. The elderly were usually reported as being mugged, raped, and murdered by black or Latino youth with long criminal records. These youth generally came from inner city areas located near the residential areas of elderly whites that had fled those same areas. Because of the media made hysteria over the alleged "crime wave," new laws were created for more harsh and punishing policies such as longer prison sentences.[1]

Discuss the following questions:

1. How is crime portrayed in your local media? What crimes receive attention? What is the race and class of those who are portrayed as responsible?

2. Does the media assist you in understanding crime? If yes, how? If no, why not?

| The Question of Crime |

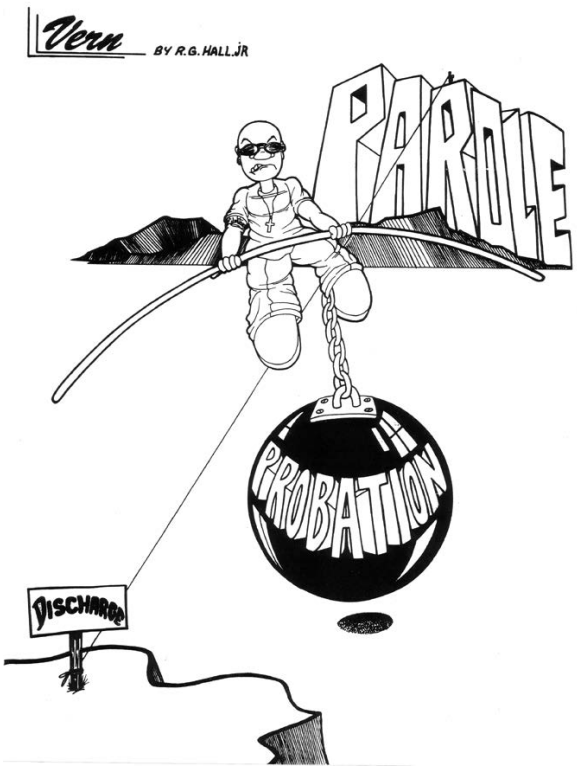
In the U.S. the word "crime" used in ways that change depending on time and place. The state only uses the word to name those acts that are considered violations of the law. As a result, the very people potentially harmed

by a crime get left out of the picture. What would happen if we instead defined crime as harm?

Too often the word crime is used not to point out acts between people. Defining crime as harm would both broaden and narrow the list of things normally considered crimes. The definition might expand the list in two ways. First, the definition might cover system-wide forms of oppression such as racist institutional policies.

Second, it might also cover what might seem like mild forms of harm such as verbal abuse between family members. At the same time, the definition of crime as harm might narrow the list of crimes by decriminalizing acts not considered harmful. Acts such as drug possession and sex work (prostitution, for example) might then no longer be considered crimes.

We may or may not agree with the definition of crime as harm. Furthermore, we might want to put limits on what counts as harm when we define crime. Should verbal abuse be considered a crime? No matter how we feel, defining crime as harm causes us to ask questions that force us to rethink what a proper response to crime might be.



For instance, should everyone who harms get punished? But isn't punishment a form of harm, especially punishment in the form of prisons? Are such forms of additional harm the price we have to pay in order to address harm? Do prisons do anything to repair the harm done? Do prisons even address harm in a way that reduces the chances of an individual harming others again?

|The Need to Understand Harm|

Along with questions and challenging how crime is usually defined, abolitionist activists would do well to prepare themselves with an approach to understanding the crimes that often set off deep fears and concerns. Mistrust about abolitionism can come from strong reactions to crimes such as murder and forms of sexual violence.

As we mentioned in the discussion of crime and the media above, responding to such strong reactions first requires an understanding of the sources of the reaction. Is it personal experience? Is it media panic? Along with this we need to provide alternative ways of understanding harm itself. Alternative ways of understanding harm can prepare us for considering alternative responses to harm.

To understand harm we need informed observations of the conditions that accompany it. One way of looking at homicide rates, for example, is to look at them historically. Looking historically, the sharpest increases in homicide rates in the U.S. happened at the time of Prohibition when the manufacturing, sale, and transportation of alcohol became

illegal. While violence from alcohol abuse dropped during this period, violence on the whole increased.

We can compare that situation to contemporary homicide rates. While turf wars over the drug market are often listed as a factor, other factors include economic hardship, involvement in wars, and availability of health care. The influence of these factors changes over time. Trends within the larger society can shift the impact of particular factors.

As abolitionists, it is important to make people realize that when we understand the foundations of specific forms of harm such as homicide, we better understand the need for broad social change. Greatly reducing rates of particular kinds of harm depends upon our ability to change the social and economic conditions in which they take place.

|Responding to Harm|

How should we respond to harm?

Opening Group Exercise

1. On one half of a large sheet of paper, list the general values you believe should guide responses to harm.

2. On the other half, brainstorm what you see as the main values and rules the government uses to deal with crime.

3. Compare and contrast each side of the paper. Discuss why the two sides differ.

Often one of the defining characteristics of the government is punishment. While there are those who benefit politically and economically from punishment, a key question is why people who do not benefit in these ways support punishment. The combination of fear, racism, heterosexism, sexism, and/or class prejudice feed into the impulse many have in wanting to punish. People often demand punishment as a kind of release for their fear and anger. At the same time, stereotypes that paint people as evil or take away their humanity make it easier to support their punishment. The more we identify with the person being punished, the less we want to see them punished.

Endnote

1. This is an adaptation of a summary found in Jerome Miller's Search and Destroy: African-American Males in the Criminal Justice System, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

> I believe we must make the system more victim-friendly, especially for those victims who are seeking healing. The system seems to encourage victims who are seeking retribution, since this becomes useful to the prosecution. However, the system is not equipped to handle those victims who want to heal.

Common Sense

Common sense is the set of understandings we all use to make it through the day. Our common sense may not always be exactly the same or in line with the politics we wish we had, but it controls our feelings of what makes sense. An important part of building abolitionist politics is showing how in some ways, in some places, abolition is already common sense. One of the major challenges in talking about abolition is that it doesn't make sense that we could have a society without punishment or one where we didn't need to forcefully remove people, even when they hurt others. However, there are parts of common sense that reject punishment and isolation as strategies for dealing with problems, and it is helpful to work with people on those levels. These contradictions mean that even a person with conservative politics is probably going to have some taken-for-granted beliefs that are actually radical.

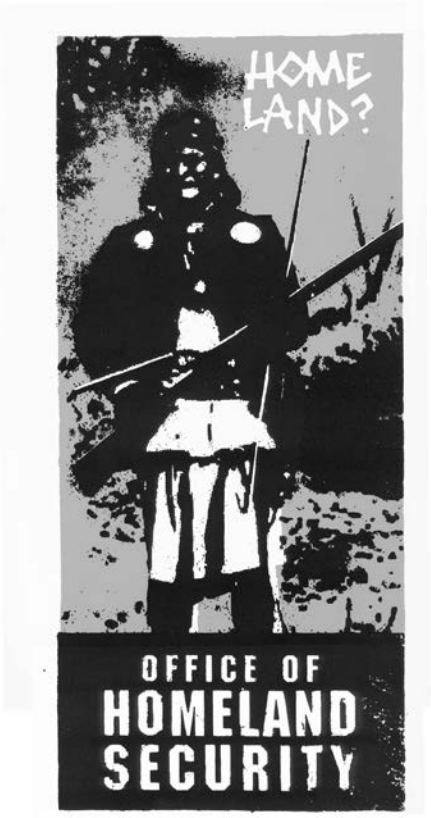
|Talking to People Where They're At|

A central part of helping people see abolition as appealing is making it seem possible. That means showing how in our own daily lives we work from particular beliefs that punishment is harmful, or that the police shouldn't be trusted, or that what politicians say is good for public safety/economic development should be taken cautiously. This section provides two examples of working with people "where they're at" through appealing to and expanding ideas that are already common sense. There are also exercises below to help you practice.

Example 1

One of us was recently talking with a friend who works as an aide at a nursery school who is not an abolitionist and supports the use of prisons and police. They talked about how she deals with so many children at once and whether she used "time-outs" in her classroom. She said that she never does, because it doesn't help the kids figure out what they are feeling, or how they can behave differently; nor does it get the kids to respect her more or help her figure out what "really happened" between them. So instead she uses a mix of strategies—normally involving a lot of questions and talking—and believes it works out much better.

In this case, even though this person believes in prisons and punishment and police for some, based on experiences from work she also has as part of her common sense a belief that is in line with abolition: that punishment and isolation don't work, but dialogue, attention, and flexibility do. Her experience as a teacher provided an opening in what she already believed to start a conversation that was critical of punishment.



EXAMPLE 2

Many people have direct experience where the government or a government agent like a police officer has done the opposite of what they claim to do (provide justice and safety or opportunity and fairness). Maybe they've been harassed or abused by the cops, or maybe they send their kids to a public school that's falling apart, or maybe they've had nowhere to turn when they needed work or job training or help dealing with an abusive partner or dangerous situation or emotional pain. These experiences may be openings to a discussion that is critical of the PIC. But lots of people also believe that the system mostly works, that it just needs to be fine-tuned, or that we have to be patient. People most affected by the PIC are often the same people calling for more policing, or other common sense paths to safety. On the one hand, common sense points out the violence of the system, while, on the other hand, still believes in its basic justice. In conversations about neglect and harm by the systems that are supposed to help, we can shift our basic perceptions—our common sense—about what these systems really do. This is a first step not only for building a movement against things like police and prisons, but for other things as well—like public schools that nurture and educate students in healthy ways.

Now try to figure out steps to challenge these activites, either as a role play or in conversation.

- What is the common sense about safety this group uses? How is it related to their position in the area—are they old-time residents, or recent gentrifiers? Do they seem to represent the feelings of most people in your neighborhood, or only a small but vocal minority?

BEWARE OF SIMPLE COMPARISONS!

Connecting with people's common sense could also produce upsetting results: to suggest that a prisoner is like a child at nursery school (as in Example 1) can do more harm than good in terms of how prisoners are perceived and how outside activists understand our relationships to prisoners. These are points of entry into conversations with people, not ready-made techniques to instantly produce a full-blown abolitionist.

Some common sense connections are even more dangerous. Many people, for example, think locking up animals in zoos is a terrible thing. Even if this is on the surface an example of common sense that rejects cages, connecting prisoners to "wild animals" only reinforces white supremacist ideas of who is sub-human and savage.

- How can you start from a desire to be safe from crime to start a conversation about alternative practices, or about the dangers of the program they're proposing?
- Where and how could you do this effectively? Would it help to talk to people one-on-one? Could you start a different neighborhood group that proposed a different model of safety?

EXECISES/BRAINSTORMS

1. LET'S START TALKING

Imagine that people in your neighborhood are starting a "Neighborhood Crime Watch" or "Civilian Corps." Maybe they're putting up signs telling people to look out for strangers, and suspicious activities. Or maybe they're trying to organize more community-based policing.

2. WHAT MAKES YOU FEEL SAFE?

(This might be a good exercise to ask people to begin before a roundtable or teach-in)

This is a brainstorm exercise. Make a list of anything that makes you feel safe. Then make a list of anything that you feel compromises your safety.

Play around with ordering the lists.

- How can you group them?
- What are the conflicts within the lists?
- Are there things that make some people feel safe that others feel keep them from being safe?
- If similar things pop up on both lists (from different people or even the same person), why do you think that is?

3. ALTERNATIVES TO PUNISHMENT: ROLE PLAY

Come up with a situation where harm has happened in your community. For this role play you need a person to play the harmer, one to play the person being harmed, and others to play friends and family for both people. Remember that friends and family can be connected to both people—especially if the harm in question is in the setting of a family or neighborhood.

For the exercise, you as a group have to figure out:

A) How you're going to meet. Who will facilitate, especially when emotions are high? How will decisions be made?
B) What is the harm that happened, and how is it still felt?
C) How can you resolve the issue without prisons or policing?

If you can come up with a situation that is specific to the group you're working with, great. You could also look to the alternatives to punishment section of this kit, which has a similar exercise about circles.

Of course, if people aren't comfortable doing a role play, you can still set up the situation and have a conversation about it.

|So What?|

The point of challenging our individual and collective common senses isn't to point out whose ideas and instincts are wrong or need to be corrected and changed. They are meant to help us see not just what we think about safety, but how many things we think about safety. This again makes the point that abolition is about building a world that is safe in multiple and lasting ways. Spending time working through what we think and how we came to think those ways about safety is an important step in that work.

> As somebody that was in prison, my—and this is probably because I'm a radical—my immediate response is to prison is that they shouldn't exist. And so it was a very gut-level kind of visceral response to being in prison.
>
> Linda Evans

Frequently Asked Questions

These are some of the questions we hear most often from people who are trying to learn more about abolition, and also from people who need some talking into the idea. These answers are not what we believe everyone should say in every situation. They are meant to give you tools and ideas to think about how you might answer these kinds of questions from the people around you.

IMPORTANT: DON'T BE SHY ABOUT ADMITTING YOU DON'T HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS.

||| Does being an abolitionist mean you just want to let everyone out of prison?

At its core, abolition isn't only about throwing all the prison doors open wide. It is also about creating new models for living. Imagining a future based on abolition means totally shifting how we think about living with each other. We must create stable communities for people to come home to even as we work to shut down all the prisons.

As a set of political beliefs, PIC abolition is based in a feeling of what is possible. So, instead of thinking about what we want to destroy it may be more helpful to think about what we must build to abolish the PIC. Our vision needs to include everyone affected by the PIC, not only the first time drug offender or the wrongly convicted, but everyone. We need to be able to create environments for ourselves that provide the basic necessities we need to live such as safe and steady housing; sufficient food; access to medical care; access to information and tools with which to process that information; resources to participate in an economy; a way to express opinions, interests or concerns; freedom from physical and psychological harm (both from individuals and the state). We need to start building those kinds of environments for ourselves as we work to abolish anything. We need healthy environments that don't depend on punishment and harm to protect the interests of the state and the rich or powerful.

We also can't just get rid of prisons without making dramatic changes in the systems that lead people to prison. We need to think about what kinds of things we could put in place to support people for whom even the best social setting may not work out. Creating more fair and lasting living environments is at the heart of our work. If creating a better environment still can't keep some people from hurting others (in all the ways that hurt happens), we do need to have something in place that would help everyone involved in the incident patch up their differences. But our current systems of policing, surveillance, courts, detention, family services, probation, and parole do not get the job done. Restorative justice practices that do not depend on our current policing and court systems may be one way of settling harms between people.

Abolition means creating long-term alternatives to the ways that we earn our livings, live together, and resolve conflicts (see sections on alternatives in this kit for examples). Working for a future based on abolition means building something real today that can be the foundation

for how we want to live. It means making practical plans for taking small steps that move us toward our dreams. It means figuring out ways for all of us to believe that things really could be different and that each of us can include this vision in our day-to-day lives.

It also means, of course, throwing all the prison doors open, tearing down the prison walls and the station houses and the detention centers and the punishing mental "health" hospitals.

WHAT ABOUT THE RAPISTS, CHILD MOLESTERS, AND MURDERERS? AREN'T THERE SOME PEOPLE WHO REALLY NEED TO BE LOCKED UP?

Rape, the sexual abuse of children, and murder are very serious and upsetting problems for everyone concerned about the wellbeing of loved ones, children, and members of our communities. Acts of great harm can understandably bring up great anger and fear. This anger can turn into a desire to punish, while fear can turn into a desire to try removing those responsible from society.

But the "need" to lock people up is a false need. No one needs to be locked up. If we take time to think through what makes an appropriate response to harm, we come to a different conclusion about what needs to be done. If we want our society to be healthy, safe, just, and fair, then alternatives to punishment and imprisonment must be put into place.

Let's consider a couple of matters in depth.

1) Punishment and Imprisonment are not Appropriate Responses to Harm

To understand why punishment and imprisonment are not appropriate responses to harm, it helps to walk through the common sense steps that lead us to developing a good response. If we walk through these steps, we come to a very different solution than punishment and imprisonment.

Awareness is one of the first steps. We need to be aware of the conditions and experiences of the person who was harmed, the person who committed the act of harm, the surrounding community, and the whole society. For our discussion here, what matters is first trying to understand those who commit acts of harm as well as the situations in which the harm happened.

When we begin to become more aware, a picture of what happened becomes clear. In learning why the act of harm happened, we usually find that more than one person needs to be held accountable. Even the worst kinds of harm do not happen without a reason. Usually there are a number of people and systems that should be held accountable. People who commit acts of harm often have been harmed themselves in the past. As result, they also need appropriate care and concern.

In the end, trying to develop higher levels of awareness gives us a broad view that makes an act of harm seem less like an isolated event. When we see harm as an event that is interconnected with the rest of the world, channeling anger only toward a particular individual doesn't make sense. Our anger is better directed elsewhere.

Abolition is about having a vision that seeks to change the social and economic conditions that lead to violence. Right now, punishment is a part of these conditions. Instead of discouraging harm, punishment makes future harm more likely because punishment encourages people to lash out. If someone committed harm because they had been harmed earlier in life, harming them even more with punishment really doesn't make sense.

Instead of punishment, people who have seriously harmed other people should have appropriate forms of support ranging from supervision to social and economic resources. Furthermore, in place of punishment we also need humane forms of accountability. Accountability means holding people to their commitments to others. Because punishment creates a feeling of social isolation instead of responsibility to other people, we need an alternative.

What a different response should look like is difficult to say, because the dominance of prisons as a response has kept us from developing alternatives. A few things, however, might be said. Immediately following an incident of serious harm, there is an especially urgent need for living spaces that ensure safety and wellbeing in a number of ways. First, these spaces should make sure that the person or people who committed the act can't harm anyone else. Second, they should make sure that people who want revenge couldn't hurt the person (or people) who committed the harm. Third, the spaces should make sure that the person who committed the harm would not harm him or herself. Because these spaces seek safety and wellbeing, they should be nothing like prisons. In fact, they should be the exact opposite since prisons are fundamentally dehumanizing and violent environments.

2) Locking People Away is a Violent Abuse of Power

Locking anyone away is wrong because it, without doubt, involves using violent and abusive power. We see this most clearly in terms of policies and practices.

First, policies and practices should never be dictated by force or fear. They should be based on concern for collective wellbeing. Because we live in a society where the media takes advantage of our fears and angers, we are constantly being hit with news about acts of violence that are coded in racist, classist, and homophobic ways. For example, connecting violence and "crime" with Black people is so deep-rooted and commonplace that Black people as a whole are criminalized. In this case, when fear is allowed to control policies and practices, Black people get targeted.

Second, the policies and practices of any institution, group, or society shouldn't be based on individual cases. Even though only a small percentage of people are imprisoned for really horrible acts, these acts are allowed to have a very uneven effect on how policy is created. Instead of basing policy on individual cases, policy should be made with the collective good in mind.

To be appropriate, responses to harm should be tailor-made in order. However, we should follow general guidelines for all responses to harm in order to guarantee fairness, equality, and humane treatment. Far from meeting these standards, the PIC goes against them as a matter of course. In the past and present, the PIC has been a central force of white supremacy and class domination. It has forced many people of color and poor whites to the lower rungs of society. Likewise, it has done this with constant violence.

Third, policies and practices should not create institutions that are anti-democratic or authoritarian. Prisons are fundamentally anti-democratic and authoritarian. Because prisons cannot operate without prison labor and general submission, prisoners are kept from organizing and having any real self-rule. As a way of excusing their position of power, the people running these institutions easily become won over by beliefs that make prisoners seem less than human. To treat someone brutally becomes possible when they are either no longer seen as human, especially in terms of race. When someone is no longer regarded as human, almost any act of violence or abuse becomes possible.

||| How will we stay safe without prisons or police?

One way to answer this question is to understand all the ways you are already safe. While the media and politicians focus on "crime" as a major problem in the US, the fact is, crime rates have dropped or stayed the same since before the prison boom. Also, "tough on crime" law making and enforcement has not had a big impact on "public safety." These media and political campaigns feed the panic about urban crime in particular. For example, most physical injury happens between people who know each other. Random violence is not as common as it's made out to be. Economic crime, like theft, is often linked to a downturn in the economy or drug addiction. People in need are more likely to turn to more desperate measures when jobs and assistance (like drug treatment or harm-reduction resources) aren't available, often because of state policies.

The government creates other crimes to increase the police's ability to control people. Along these lines, loitering, panhandling, public camping, and other so-called quality of life crimes, become excuses for police to hassle homeless people, queer people, young people and others who spend time living or socializing on the street.

So while there is real harm that happens everyday, the fear for our public safety is based less on real harm than on hype that blows the threat of that harm way out of proportion. Of course, harm does happen, and any movement for PIC abolition has to create ways to prevent harm more effectively and address everyone involved when harm happens. Before we think about how to reach this important goal, it's also helpful to make a new framework for what we mean when we talk about staying safe.

While police and prisons may make some people feel safer, they are not actually making us safer, especially in the long run. Rather, police, prisons, and the wider effect of the prison industrial complex create major barriers to other kinds of safety we need to live. With most financial resources going into policing and controlling people (especially people of color, poor people, immigrants, and others), there is less of an opportunity for people most affected by crime and poverty to get resources to deal with those concerns where they live. Police target specific neighborhoods and specific people for surveillance and control. As a result, people of color, poor people, queer people, and others are often made unsafe by the intrusions of police - whether they suffer physical abuse, constant harassment, or removal from their communities.

The impact of imprisonment is also serious. Many people of color and poor people have really suffered because people from their families and neighborhoods are being removed. Not only has building up police and prison failed to change official crime rates, the focus on crime fighting as

the only way to create safety limits what we think of as keeping us safe. Basic needs, like housing, food, access to mental and physical health care, and knowing that those things are not constantly at risk, are also essential for people's safety.

Working to end the prison industrial complex means trying to create all these kinds of safety, including day-to-day stability, self-determination, and a way to deal with interpersonal harm. PIC abolition is one way of creating safety. Abolitionist organizing projects focus on tearing down the system by seeing it as unnecessary. These projects also create safety by coming up with better ways of dealing with harm that involve regular people (not just the police, courts, and prisons) and that meet the needs of anyone affected by an act of harm.

Taking care of everyone's needs is crucial to help keep harm from happening again. Our current system does not focus on this and does not do this. Since many harms happen between people who know each other, well-developed ways for creating accountability without punishment could keep families and other communities together while reducing the harm within them. Abolitionist strategies are also focused on dealing with the societal inequalities that harm people. Hopefully, these strategies can lead to stability and self-determination that will help keep harm from happening in the first place.

Of course, when people are in immediate danger - whether that's physical violence by a partner or the threat of violence on the street - we need to know there is some possible way of getting safe immediately. So far, abolitionists have not created practical ways of providing that alternative to the police. This has to be one of our projects, along with others aimed at creating better ways of doing what we're told the PIC does for us. Creating those working alternatives is a part of the abolitionist vision for creating real safety.

||| What can I do instead of calling the cops?

One of the biggest problems we face trying to build a world that doesn't rely on policing and punishment is that when people need an outside person to get involved in a situation, the police are often the only option. In so many different situations when people are in direct physical danger, or when someone hears a strange noise or a fight down the street, even when someone needs directions, the police get called. Our dependence on the police in all these situations just strengthens the PIC.

As abolitionists we don't believe that we can just say "never call the police" and people will be safer. But we do need to think about what happens when the police get called, why they get called, and how we can set up our own plans to replace the police. It makes sense that people call the police because they want support or need to change a situation. But when you call the cops, you mostly get only bad options.

Calling the police is a catch-all solution for what are normally specific problems with specific roots. The cops are a catch-all with only one real option: they can use or threaten to use force. Cops have the legal and physical power to direct the situation, so they end up controlling all the options. This usually means doing nothing, or taking one person (or more) away. Typically these are not effective strategies for handling an immediate conflict and preventing others.

Calling the police doesn't guarantee that a situation will get better. Everybody loses control when the police come. Not only does a person being violent or threatening violence run out of options, but so does the person who called the cops and everyone else around. Even people in the neighborhood who don't have a connection to the situation lose control. This happens because more cops in the area means more surveillance, which means more people getting taken away. This loss of control over the situation is especially true in communities of color that already suffer under intense police repression and surveillance.

A better option might be calling someone else—a neighbor, family member, or friend. Call someone who can get to where you are quickly, help tone things down, and help come up with a comfortable ending. That ending might be staying until everybody cools off, or checking out that strange noise with you, or providing a place for someone to stay for a while, or helping someone to leave.

A problem is that we don't usually set up these situations ahead of time, so people call the cops (even if they don't really want to) because there isn't another plan. It might help here to remember that we don't call the cops naturally. We are always being told to call them. We hear this from teachers in elementary school, from movies, news, and other media, from seeing other people do it, and, not least, from cops themselves.

So it makes sense that we should do a little planning ourselves to set up an alternative. It doesn't have to be complicated, or involve a million back up plans, or involve a complex commitment.
It can be as simple as asking a friend a basic question: "If I needed to, could I call you?" or telling someone, "If you ever needed someone, you could call me."

We know that this is nothing like a perfect solution. But we have to begin to try out what solutions might work, especially because we know that calling the police doesn't.

||| What makes an abolitionist approach to the PIC different from reformist ones?

Abolitionists are often described as inflexible. There are many ways to come at abolishing the PIC, and no one path to a world without prisons and policing. There are actions that make sense up front, like opposing changes to visiting regulations for family members or for attorneys and their support staff. These actions help make sure that people who are locked up are treated as human beings.

However, there are also reforms that in the end make the long-term goal of getting rid of the PIC impossible. For example, in response to the terrible conditions that most prisoners across the country live in, abolitionists might focus on strategies that first look at how we can let people out of those cages instead of ones that just build better cages. Building new cells and prisons helps to extend the life of the PIC as a system. This goes directly against a long-term abolitionist goal of eliminating the system. It also just gives us one more prison to close down in the end.

The differences between these approaches are more than just being inclusive or exclusive. They are about strategy and long-term vision. They depend on what you want the end result of your work to be. The history of reform has brought us such things as prisons themselves (in the form of penitentiaries) and the expansion of prison systems when new prisons are built to "replace" overcrowded or crumbling old ones. Folsom prison in California was built to replace San Quentin prison to deal with overcrowding and poor conditions—both prisons still exist nearly 125 years later.

Mandatory minimums, determinant sentencing, and the juvenile justice system, are all reforms that have strengthened the PIC instead of tearing it down, or even shrinking it. At the core, the difference between the two positions is the difference between trying to make the PIC better and trying to tear the PIC down.

For these reasons, sometimes organizers who identify themselves as abolitionist support groups that use strategies that might be called reformist rather than abolitionist (like providing better health care and education to prisoners, making parole and probation accessible to more prisoners, supporting prisoner work stoppages and strikes—all things that don't necessarily abolish the system itself). There are certain strategies however, (like the trade off between "violent" and "non-violent" prisoners or constructing new jails and prisons to create better conditions) that undercut the work that abolitionists do and create the distinction between abolition and reform.

How can we talk about abolition without saying the "a" word? Is it important to use the word even though it's scary?

How and when to talk about abolition depends very much on the situation and our goals. In some cases we need to say the word abolition loud and often. We need to find ways to get the idea mixed into everyday discussions and debates. We need to say it often enough and in enough situations that it becomes one of the words that we use to talk about the full range of strategies for dealing with the PIC.

Many people are really scared about bad people running through the streets killing people without prisons and police to keep the bad people in check. In talking to them it may be best to talk about abolition as if it's common sense, but without using the word. Even though it is important to talk mostly about alternatives in either case, discussing alternatives is really important in this case. People need to see that we're not trying to put anyone in danger with this vision, but are trying to imagine what might actually make people safe.

When we talk about abolition without actually saying the word, we need to focus on actual steps and a clear vision of where we hope those things will lead us. Hopefully in talking about abolition without using the word we can create a common sense among people that eventually will lead them to be able to use the "a" word confidently and without any doubts.

Tools For Framing Abolitionist Arguments In Terms of What We Want

Often the ideas we use to argue for an end to prisons, police take-over, surveillance, social control, and other parts of the prison industrial complex are based in why we're against those systems, how they hurt our communities, and why they do not work. Understanding these systems and institutions, and having the tools to make arguments against them is one important part of being able to build the movement to end them. We need to be able to talk about what we want, what else we can envision, why we believe something else can work and how we imagine building communities where we can determine how to create and maintain safety.

We all want the same thing: safe communities.

The issue is how we get there.

Does the current system work to keep all of us safe?

Trying to tell people we meet that we're working toward not having prisons, not having police, and not relying on punishment is hard. Telling people this is hard because they think we're crazy, or don't care about safety, or that we've never been harmed or had anyone close to us hurt. All of this makes talking about abolition tough. Framing our arguments in ways that show what's wrong with system, what we do want, and ideas for getting there (no matter how small) sometimes makes it easier to be heard. It can also make it easier to talk to people who don't buy it right off.

Below are some ideas for framing arguments about abolition in ways that either don't refer to abolition outright and/or talk about the movement to end the PIC in positive ways.

|Talk about building safe communities|

One part of abolition is the vision. We are working to build communities that are safe and secure for everyone WITHOUT taking people away from their homes, families, and friends. To do this, we need to build accountability. While we know this takes time and work, there are examples of communities throughout the world (and in the US) that are good models (see the What Is Abolition pamphlet and Alternative Practices for some). Those of us who want to live this vision can start by finding ways in our own day-to-day lives to create accountability that isn't based in punishment. Than can be with our kids, our friends, or strangers.

Ask the people you're talking with to consider one way they can change their community to create safety without involving the police or prisons:

- Can they organize people to help keep the area cleaned up?
- Can they get a community center up and running for the people in the neighborhood?
- Can they provide resources and referrals for people coming home from prisons, or people at risk of getting caught up by the police?
- Often, when someone harms another person, they are told they need to be accountable to the state and/or the person they harmed. What if the community in which that person lives or harmed someone was also held accountable to help address what happened? Can the people you're talking to organize community meetings to address problems in ways that hold people accountable to their communities and have the groups held accountable to the people in them?

Keep in mind that a community can be as small or as big as what works for its members (see the Keyword "Community"). Since these kinds of tools work best when people share the same goals, suggest that they try it out with people they are already accountable to in some way. Remind people you talk to that part of building a movement for abolition is pushing us to imagine what else is possible and what would work better, then creating realistic, do-able projects that reflect those visions.

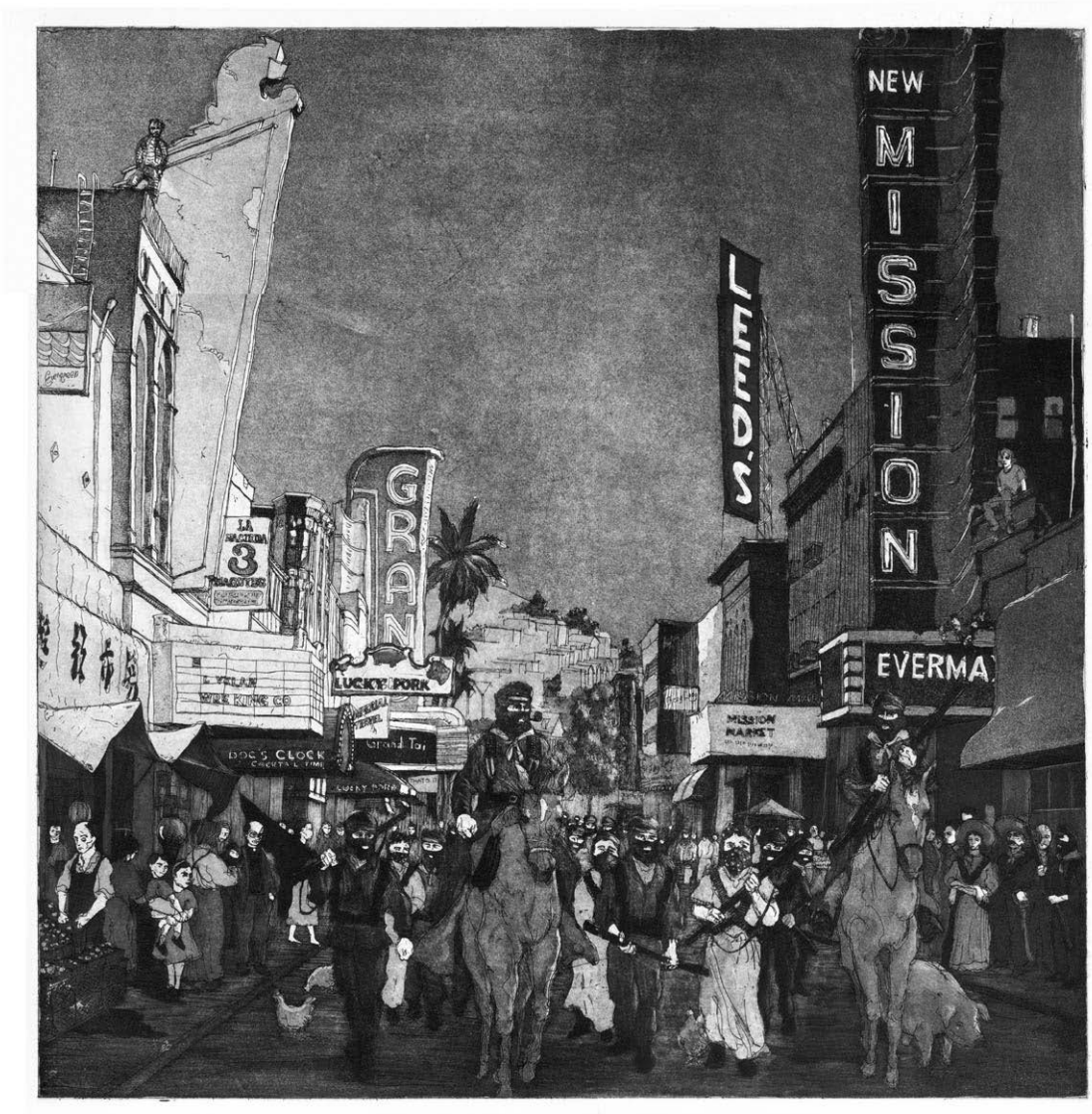
|Redefine safety|

Policing and prisons are held up as the only solution, the only ways to control problems and create safety. One positive way to talk about what we do is to challenge that idea by talking to people about what really makes our communities safe. What else makes safety?

Talk to people about:

- housing
- meaningful jobs
- self-determination (see Keywords)
- a clean environment
- being able to resist police control
- anything that makes people feel safer or that they imagine might make people in their communities feel safer.

Even in communities that are most affected by the PIC, people often still support policing and imprisonment and feel safer because of them. This shouldn't limit talking about OTHER THINGS that create safety, and moving the conversation to talk about positive things that can create increased safety and that may be longer lasting over time.



Sometimes it helps to talk about the limits people face coming home from prison and to show the consequences of people not having access to resources. Do former prisoners have access to safety when they come home? It can be really helpful to get people to talk about what makes them feel safest - and where you (the facilitator) can see patterns that speak to things other than police and prisons, create a discussion about how to create more of that kind of safety in a community or home. It is important to help people realize the most immediate things they can do:

- find out who in the neighborhood can provide jobs to people
- find out where resources are for former prisoners or other people who need resources to survive and circulate the information
- have neighborhood activities (block parties, cookouts) that can get people together and give people a space to talk over concerns

These can help it seem more do-able, since the idea of creating better jobs, housing, education, resources can be too much to take in all at once.

Exercise

Ask people to imagine what makes them feel safe and build a project or vision based on finding ways to create that safety. Help the group brainstorm one idea they can put into action.

|Give examples of abolitionist projects that are concrete and immediate, that can be replicated in people's communities|

Look in this handbook, and keep your eyes and ears open for all kinds of projects that are short-term abolitionist projects. Often, they may not be identified as abolitionist by the people doing them or may not immediately seem to be abolitionist. Despite that, a lot of projects that are intended to address people's need for housing, food, and jobs, have the potential effect of shrinking the prison population or limiting police control. A lot of organizations that work around homeless rights, poor people's rights, queer rights, labor, etc.... are working for self-determination and against some of the same power relationships that keep the PIC so strong.

So, an abolitionist project could be:

- building resources with people coming out of jails and prisons that will help keep people out of prisons and be successful on the outside
- fighting police control of homeless people and working to address their needs
- fighting a prison being sited in your community
- creating an education project, newsletter, or radio show to talk about the PIC and abolition and give people links to local resources,
- working with a harm-reduction or needle exchange group to get resources to drug-users (who often end up in the system), etc...

IMPORTANT: an abolitionist project shouldn't wind up in any increase in the size, scope, or power of the PIC. As organizers, people should be clear about their goals and about the possible consequences of the work they're doing.

|Feel free to admit you don't know the answers to all the hard questions - that's part of the work we're doing|

It sounds much better and it's much more real to admit that abolition is a big goal. And while we are strongly committed to it, we know that we don't have the perfect way to make it work now. What we do have are examples of alternatives to how we're living, and a basic understanding that the PIC isn't designed to make people safer. It does not do that well, either. We can build something better for ourselves.

It helps to recognize that people do hurt each other and take things from each other. We can also say that as abolitionists we want to find good ways to build accountability that meet the needs of all people involved in an incident and the needs of the community in which something happens.

You can also point out that most crime that law enforcement says it addresses can be more or less directly linked to the conditions created by the state as a result of oppression of poor people and people of color, the political and social repression of poor people, people of color, queers, and other groups. The PIC, which is a system for removing people from targeted communities - again poor communities and communities of color - has the effect of knocking those communities off balance and making it even easier to target them.

You can always call on people's common sense ideas (see Common Sense). Sometimes people's common sense ideas about how they've been targeted by racist police or an oppressive economic system and job market will be a way in to talking about undoing the PIC altogether. These ideas can link you back to re-imagining safety and to specific goals groups of people can create for themselves to build the safety they seek.

You have to get past what "everybody knows."

And a lot of that really involves, strangely enough, listening to people, as well as –In other words, it's not just a question of what we've done all these years is gone out and given a lot of speeches to persuade people that we're right and they're wrong. A lot of it is walking up to people and saying "You know, the situation really sucks in this neighborhood, there's all this crime, everyone's afraid to walk around the street—what do you think we should do about this? I mean do you feel safer know that there's all these cops, is that really solving the problem?" And just talk to people and sit back and listen...

…I've had instances where people have come up to me and say, "I heard about this case on the news the other day, and the first thing I thought of was all this mess you've been telling me all this years, and you know, I think you're right." You have to patient enough to realize that there is a dialogue going on…that people who wrestle with ideas, who are wrestling with them because of very real challenges they're confronting, like fear of crime, like initially having no idea of what might be done other than locking everyone in the damn country up…when they finally do turn around…those end up being your strongest allies—people who really are going to kick ass and do a lot of hard work, and they end up being the people also that can teach you a lot.

LINDA THURSTON

Words Matter
Thoughts on Language and Abolition

Words alone can't save us. But our language does shape what we can imagine, and by using new words and old words differently, we can imagine new things. A major reason the PIC grows is that we are told there isn't another option. We need to use language creatively to help us develop strong, specific challenges to the PIC.

The way people talk about policing, prisons, safety, and crime shapes what we think these things are, and forms the ways we imagine change can or should happen. Words are not neutral, and it's important that we break down and reshape their meanings in our own materials and conversations. We can use language to shift debates, make people see things differently, and challenge our own assumptions and fears. Below are discussions and specific examples of how our word choice can not only help us make stronger abolitionist arguments, but figure out what abolition can look like.

Innocent	Prisoner	Guilty	Inmate
Violent	Victim	Non-Violent	Justice
Criminal	Safety	Convict	Punishment

These words get used all the time when people talk about prisons, police, courts, and public safety. People who support the PIC use them as often as people who are fighting the PIC. They are filled with guesses about the people and ideas they describe. Often, these same guesses make the PIC seem logical and necessary. They re-define people and actions in terms of the categories the word represents. In this way a person becomes a criminal, and the act of the state putting someone in a cage becomes justice. These categories keep up people's fear for their safety, their understanding of what they need to be safe, and their reliance on and acceptance of police and prisons.

Most of these words work in pairs: when we use one, we are really using both. Innocent and guilty are a pair like this. The idea that you are either innocent or guilty is a natural assumption and it's what immediately comes to mind for most people. So saying that innocent people shouldn't be in prison (which most of us can agree is true), also says that guilty people should be. It suggests that most people who are locked up deserve to be there because they "did something." If we want to say that people are being picked up, harassed, or held without charges; there are ways to say it without suggesting that people in other circumstances are worse, or have done bad things, or deserve to be in cages.

It's important to pay close attention to the words we use to describe people in cages. Most often they are called "inmates," "criminals," and "prisoners." What are the differences?

Inmate. Originally, this term meant someone who shared a house with others. Currently, it mostly refers to people in prisons and mental institutions.

Criminal. This term doesn't just mean someone convicted of a crime, or even someone who harms others. It implies that causing harm is essentially a part of this person, maybe even the most meaningful part of their personality.

Prisoner. This is someone kept in a cage against their will by some powerful force (like the state), whether that power is just or not.

These words also have race and gender meanings. For example, criminal and Black are often code words for each other. There is lots of pressure from white supremacy in media, or in policing, (or both, as in the TV show Cops and even local news) to make an automatic connection between these terms, by assuming a "criminal" is going to be a Black person, and in assuming that a Black person is going to be

a "criminal." There are particular ways terms like these have gender meanings, too. "Welfare queen," is one term that could be thought of as a femininely gendered word for "criminal." It works to make Black women and "criminals" interchangeable. This combination of gender and race meanings applies to men, too. "Gang member" and "sexual predator" are two examples of words that work to make Black men and "criminals" the same thing.

Prisoner is different from inmate and criminal, because it describes people who have been put in cages. It helps us remember that people aren't locked up for their own good or even just as a place to stay (which inmate implies), or that they are can't be separated from the harm they might/might not have caused (which is implied by criminal). The word prisoner helps us see the state as actively choosing to put people in cages, while inmate and (especially) criminal suggest that imprisonment is the only or even the best way to handle certain people. In this way the word prisoner also gets away from the harmful gender and racial dynamics of a word like criminal, which helps to disrupt the links to the PIC's white supremacy and sexism.

WHAT ARE THE WORDS YOU USE AND HEAR TO DESCRIBE PEOPLE IN CAGES? WHAT MEANINGS DO THEY HAVE?

Language works not only to define types of people in relation to the PIC, but types of actions, too. People fighting prison expansion or working to end the drug war often focus on taking advantage of public feelings about violent vs. non-violent crimes, or concerns about locking up too many drug users and not enough drug dealers. For example, you might see:

The drug laws drive prison expansion, fill prisons with non-violent, minor offenders, and drain resources from other services, such as drug treatment and education.

OR

Non-violent drug offenders are spending more time in prison than murderers and rapists.

Exercise

Go over these questions about the statements above, and use them to help you write an abolitionist re-working of those ideas:

1. What differences are being made between "violent" and "non-violent" offenders here?
2. What is suggested about the use of prisons generally?
3. How could you re-phrase this information to be in line with the ideas that no one should be in a cage, and that putting people in cages helps no one?

We can use language and ideas to transform how people think about what makes them safe. We can challenge the ways people are told to think about what makes their communities safe. And we can create materials that make clear a vision of community safety that does not depend on controlling, caging, or removing people. We need to be able to decide and create safety for ourselves, without leaving anyone behind. When we make materials, we need to recognize how we can best use language to make our ideas clear and common sense. We must be able to do this without falling into the trap of tough on crime language that weakens the long-term goal of abolition.

EXERCISES FOR THINKING ABOUT LANGUAGE IN YOUR WORK

EXERCISE 1

Get out materials and literature that your organization(s) use (or that the state or other organizations use). Go through these questions to try to understand more critically what the language is doing.

1. Who is this language addressing? Who is it easily understood by? Where is this literature used?
2. What categories are used to describe:
   - •people
   - •institutions
   - •political systems and ideals

   What political views do those categories back up?
3. What political message is being sent—how is or isn't that abolitionist? What is the role of cages in the political program being suggested or implied?
4. How could you change the wording to more clearly oppose all aspects of the PIC? Or, if you're using material you disagree with as an example, how does the language support the PIC?

EXERCISE 2

Pick out one (or two, or however many you want to handle) words, and try to see how it is used, and how you might use it in a more radical way. For example, you might choose "punishment."

1. Brainstorm all the meanings it has—whose agenda(s) do those meanings serve?
2. What other words is it closely connected to? What do those connections do?
3. Where do you hear this word used most often? By whom?
4. What other words address some of the same issues and assumptions in different ways?
5. Are there ways to use the word "against itself"—to use it in a way that challenges the way it's most commonly used right now?

The point here is not just to change the words we use, but to examine how changing our words changes what we can see. It can also help point out what assumptions we might decide to hold onto. Maybe there is a difference between stealing a stereo and hurting another person. But saying non-violent and violent is only one way to show that difference, one set up by the state through its laws. We endorse that state action every time we use this difference. What are more complex ways to struggle with that difference?

So it's not that I don't think that any reform work can be done; I just think that it's very, very important that people keep an abolitionist perspective to always check that against. And the way that we've always managed to do that here is to always talk about our short-term work, and what our day-to-day looks like, and what our long-term vision is. And so every time we're about to work on something or someone proposes it, we have this long-term vision about abolition to check it against, and to say "does this in any way contradict this" or get us off the track or make our path longer to get to this end goal, and if we sense that it does, then it's not an option for us.

MIMI BUDNICK

Shrinking The System

Decarceration, getting people out of jails and prisons, is one strategy for abolishing the PIC. Getting and keeping people out of cages is a really important step toward ending the use of cages completely. Below are three sets of de-carceral strategies. They are a jumping off point for thinking creatively about what strategies and tactics will help to shrink the PIC to the point of non-existence.

A strategy for reducing the US prison population: No one dies in prison.

By Rachel Maddow

What if the anti-PIC movement committed itself to the goal, "No one dies in prison"?

The Bureau of Justice Statistics says that in the year 2000, there were 2865 deaths in state prisons:

•84 people were executed
•185 people killed themselves
•56 people were killed by another person
•24 people were victims of accidents
•2313 people died of "natural causes"
•203 people had no specified cause of death[2]

2865 is a relatively small number, compared with the millions who pass through US jails and prisons every year. Taking on the issue of death in prison is therefore not, at first glance, a strategy that strikes at the heart of the US imprisonment binge.

But reducing the number of deaths in prison can still be an important abolitionist strategy for two reasons: 1. it is a relatively practical, achievable goal that could actually reduce the prison population, and 2. working toward this goal requires a type of prison activism that helps the abolitionist cause.

|Why is this a practical, achievable goal?|

The vast majority of people who die in prison die from illness and old age ("natural causes"), so to seriously reduce the number of deaths in prison, advocates could focus on obtaining early release for ill and elderly prisoners. While releasing prisoners is rarely popular among the "general public", there are a few cracks in the system through which we could begin to make this argument. It is very expensive to incarcerate ill and elderly prisoners. During our current national fiscal crisis, targeting potential strategies for reducing spending can be an effective tool for arguing for decarceration (see below for more examples). A majority of states already have laws providing for "medical parole" or "compassionate release" of dying prisoners, or prisoners whose medical needs cannot be met in prison, that advocates of this position could build upon.

Strategies could include:

•expansion and implementation of medical parole (a.k.a. compassionate release) for terminally ill or elderly prisoners
•sentencing diversion for ill or elderly prisoners
•no prison hospices

|Why does the process of working toward this goal help the abolitionist cause?|

•Campaigns to get individual ill or elderly prisoners released usually put activists in close contact with an imprisoned person, sometimes with the prisoner's friends behind bars, and sometimes with the prisoner's family members outside, often contributing both to the level of commitment people feel to the issue and the level of knowledge people have about what goes on inside prisons. The more people know about conditions inside, generally the easier it is to suggest to them that prisoners not live in those conditions.

•Campaigns for individual ill or elderly prisoners require activists to apply pressure on (and therefore learn about) a number of different levels of the prison bureaucracy: medical, prison hierarchy, parole board, legislature, governor. Furthermore, campaigns to improve and expand medical parole laws require activists to learn about legislative/administrative accountability for prison policy – an area that is confusing and intimidating for many activists.

•Medical parole campaigns usually require a community placement for the prisoner after release (i.e. a community hospice). Working to find a placement for ill and elderly prisoners in the community makes more community agencies think about prisoners, and makes additional connections between prisons and the outside world. Finding appropriate placements also forces us to consider the kinds of services and settings that will truly make people coming home safe and secure.

•Prison hospices are a "reformist", non-abolitionist solution to the problem of deaths in prison: they give prison officials and doctors an excuse to not release people to die in the community. Opposing prison hospices can be a radicalizing experience for prison activists, because it opposes liberal reform, and clarifies the principal need to get people out of prison, rather than making prisons nicer.

Endnote

1. Bureau of Justice Statistics (2002) HIV in Prisons, 2000. www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/hivp00.htm

Mental Health and Decarceration

Adapted from pieces by Terry Kupers

"The Mental Health Crisis Behind Bars," FORUM/ The Harvard Mental Health Letter, July 2000 and "Beware of Easy Answers for the Mental Health Crisis Behind Bars," The Fortune News, Fall 2000

The jail and prison populations could be greatly reduced by putting diversion and restorative justice programs into place for harms committed by people suffering from serious mental illnesses. 90 to 95% of all prisoners will be released, the average within several years. Criminal defendants suffering from serious mental illnesses, and those who commit minor crimes involving alcohol and drugs, have a much better chance for recovery if they are diverted into an appropriate mental health or drug treatment program.

There also need to be more stepdown units, which are more or less the same as residential treatment facilities in the community, where prisoners with serious mental disorders can be partially sheltered as they undergo treatment. Mental health staffs need to make contact with prisoners' families and need to do conscientious post-release treatment planning. Diversion and stepdown units both make it possible to provide supported and supervised treatment, while not relying on caging people as a solution.

While diversion from prison into mental health care offers hope for reducing the prison population and providing treatment for many prisoners, however, it also has the potential to increase the repressiveness of the criminal justice system. New laws that expand involuntary outpatient treatment programs could also be applied to many other individuals who have merely failed to follow their treatment plans and will recycle into prisons. There is also danger that the focus will be too narrow, and the newly sensitized public's shock about

the mistreatment of prisoners suffering from mental illness will result in some empty relief for a small subpopulation of prisoners while the inhuman conditions and human rights abuses suffered by almost all prisoners will continue unchecked.

Diversion programs, including drug courts and mental health courts, could be a positive development, but sufficient resources must be put into public mental health programs so that the people eligible for those programs would want to voluntarily agree to quality treatment. If resources are inadequate and people are just forced to take medications, diversion becomes another repressive measure fueling the further expansion of the prison industrial complex. Like people on probation and parole, people who are diverted to mandatory outpatient treatment are still under the control of the prison industrial complex even while living outside of prison settings. And many mental health facilities aren't very different from prisons themselves, so we need to be mindful about not just trading one cage for the another.

|Budget Cuts and Decarceration|

Below are just some of the examples of ways that states have cut prison spending (by either closing prisons or prison yards, introducing plans to end prison construction, using early parole, or making changes to current sentencing practices). It is important to note that the cuts listed below are changes made by states in hopes of maintaining prison systems (not get rid of them)—minimum and medium security prisons get closed, nonviolent prisoners get sentencing relief. During this period of intense financial crisis, however, the budget is a good place to suggest additional cuts that could strike at the heart of the PIC.

> I don't see a society with other values still having this same kind of system. So if you don't want to call it abolishing, you can call it something else, but I just think that ultimately, that's where a lot of folks are going to get to—they're going to get there.
>
> Masai Ehehosi

WHAT U.S. STATES ARE DOING TO REDUCE PRISON SPENDING:

Reducing the Number of People in Prison and the Number of Prisons

Rose Braz, June 2003

ALASKA	Legislation to build a large prison are on hold in Juneau as Gov. Frank Murkowski's administration takes a look at corrections issues.
ARKANSAS	The state Board of Corrections made up to 513 prisoners eligible for early release. The Legislature has moved to revise the state's requirement that a prisoner do 70% of his or her time.
DELAWARE	The House approved 37-0 a bill that rewrites sentencing guidelines for many crimes, easing the penalties for some drug offenses.
GEORGIA	Department of Corrections proposed closing one prison to save costs. State legislature is considering sentencing reform.
HAWAII	Changed sentencing law in 2002 to mandate probation and drug treatment in lieu of incarceration for nonviolent, first-time drug offenders, to ease costs and prison crowding.
IDAHO	Considering sentencing reform.
ILLINOIS	Did not open two newly built prisons; delayed opening of a nearly completed youth prison; closed two work camps, one boot camp and four work-release facilities; halted construction on two prison projects.
INDIANA	Gov. Frank O'Bannon discussed early release of some prisoners.
IOWA	Cut 225 prison staff during last fiscal year and 355 this year. The House gave final approval to sentencing reform package that would equalize penalties for powder and crack cocaine and would allow some “violent offenders” to have their prison terms shortened.
KANSAS	Senate Bill 123, a reform package aimed at directing drug users to community rehabilitation programs rather than to prison, was signed into law by Gov. Kathleen Sebelius April 21.
KENTUCKY	Released 567 “nonviolent offenders” early by governor's order; cut Department of Corrections 5% from FY2001 and FY2002. Senate Passed Bill On Reduction Of Sentences. Parolees returned to prison for minor parole violations are getting credit for time served on the street under a systematic change the General Assembly approved as part of the state budget this spring. State officials hope to save more than $2.6 million through the summer of 2004 with the change that took effect April 1.

MICHIGAN	Michigan Legislature Repealed Draconian Mandatory Minimum Drug Sentences. On March 1, some first-time, "nonviolent drug offenders" sentenced under Michigan's mandatory minimum law were freed. Lenawee County commissioners agreed to try again for a state grant to launch a community corrections program aimed at reducing the number of people sent to prison and jail.
MISSISSIPPI	Mississippi has saved $11.6 million since July 1, 2001, from a 11/2-year-old law that reduces mandatory prison sentences from 85 percent of the original sentence to 25 percent for certain "nonviolent offenders." Some prisoners could earn a day off for every day they work, rather than a day off for every three days worked, under a plan the House OK'd.
MISSOURI	Proposes to shut two prisons and release more than 1,000 "nonviolent offenders" early. Considering not opening Jefferson City Correctional Center next year. Senate Advances Bill That Would Revise Criminal Laws, Shrink Prison Population.
MONTANA	Corrections has 68 job vacancies, its budget cut by $1.6 million. Bill would eliminate jailing of some drug users.
NEBRASKA	Proposes to close a youth prison. In a move designed to send a message about the severity of the state's budget crisis, lawmakers voted to save money by closing a maximum-security prison and releasing about 500 inmates.
NEVADA	Pending budget cuts would force closure of 13 minimum-security facilities, requiring early release of thousands of prisoners.
NEW HAMPSHIRE	Closed one prison. Corrections is expected to cut another 62 positions.
NEW MEXICO	With Gov. Bill Richardson steadfastly opposed to building more prisons, New Mexico corrections officials are hoping to revive an early-release program scuttled in the mid-1990s.
NEW YORK	As part of the budget, the state Legislature approved a plan to let about 1,300 "nonviolent" prisoners out of prison early. Gov. George Pataki, who was first elected to office on a platform of harsher jail terms and parole restrictions, is advocating letting some well-behaved drug offenders out of prison early and ending parole early for others.

NORTH CAROLINA	House members said legislators should hold off building one of three prisons proposed in the Senate's budget, and avoid future overcrowding by passing a series of changes to state sentencing laws that would let some prisoners out early.
OHIO	Closed one prison and plans to close a second. Considering closing a juvenile detention facility.
OKLAHOMA	State senators voted to restore a law that would reduce prison crowding by letting some prisoners out at least 60 days early. The Oklahoma Sentencing Commission approved strategies that include broader use of probation and cutting mandatory minimums for minor drug possession to reduce Oklahoma's prison population.
OREGON	Released prisoners early from some prisons; plans to close four juvenile detention centers.
PENNSYLVANIA	Northampton County released about 100 prisoners early to cut prison costs. Corrections plans to close two prisons in FY2003-04, keeping them on standby or "mothballed."
SOUTH CAROLINA	Corrections budget cut by nearly one-fourth in two years; prison system now operating with approximately 600 fewer security staff than four years ago. Corrections says it might need to release workers - and possibly 2,600 prisoners – to avoid a $20 million deficit.
TEXAS	The tough-on-crime Lone Star State reduced its prison population by 8,000 by paroling more people and reducing the number of parolees returned to prison for noncriminal, technical violations of parole. With the state facing a $9.9 billion budget shortfall and agencies required to make cutbacks, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice has sent a list of potential reductions, totaling seven percent -- or $172 million -- from the department's 2003 fiscal year budget to Gov. Perry.
UTAH	Considering Sentencing reform.
VERMONT	Cut funds for Corrections housing in 2002, eliminating supervised apartments for furloughed prisoners, many of them juveniles.
WASHINGTON	Some prisoners convicted of lesser crimes will be released early under a new law. Senate Bill 5990 is a scaled-down version of Governor Locke's own proposal to save nearly $100 million by cutting sentences for some nonviolent offenders and eliminating supervision for some released prisoners.
WISCONSIN	Approximately 400 “nonviolent offenders” who violate probation or parole would avoid prison and enter a rehabilitation program under governor's proposed budget.

Abolitionist Steps

|How Do We Reach Our Goal?|

The ultimate goal of abolition can seem a long ways off. Considering the obstacles we currently face, how might we imagine reaching abolition? What practical struggles can we take up in the present? Part of the key to answering both of these questions is to view the path towards abolition as one that requires gradual steps rather than instant leaps.

What are these abolitionist steps? Are they reforms? Some reforms help keep oppressive institutions alive. They become tools to keep things as they are. They cause activists to become manipulated or taken over. They lead to harmful compromises that take us away from our goal. Are all reforms, however, necessarily bad?

|Another Perspective|

A helpful distinction to make is between abolitionism and reformism. In a very clear way, abolitionism and reformism differ in terms of ideals. The abolitionist keeps a constant eye on an alternative vision of the world in which the PIC no longer exists, while the reformist envisions changes that stop short of this. This simple difference often comes from more deeply rooted differences in how the PIC is critically understood. Abolitionist analysis leads to the conclusion that the PIC is fundamentally unjust and must be brought to an end. Reformist analysis typically leads to the conclusion that the PIC can be made just if certain changes are made.

Both the abolitionist and the reformist might be for the same change, but they consider and push for these changes in really different ways because of their different understandings and ideals. As an example, consider the change of trying to get third-party monitors inside prisons.

Reformists might try to get monitors inside mainly because they want to see less brutality by guards against prisoners. Their underlying understanding might be that the brutal conditions of prisons would mostly disappear if it were not for a lack of professional accountability on the part of prison guards and administration.

Abolitionists, on the other hand, would begin with the belief that prisons are brutal and dehumanizing at their core. Participating in a campaign for monitors, however, could still be possible. Abolitionists could push for the campaign to be tailored towards their own ends. Public education could be presented with an approach that demonstrates the fundamental injustices of prisons.

Trying to get monitors inside prisons could also be tied to larger goals that lead more towards the direction of abolitionism. For instance, trying to get monitors could be connected to trying to get other changes inside prisons that guarantee prisoners the right to organize and have greater self-rule. This is exactly what happened during the 1970s at a prison in Massachusetts. The monitors came into the prison while the prisoners organized and governed themselves during a guard strike. Because prisoner organizing is a necessity for getting closer to abolition, such a reform would be a significant advance, even for abolitionists.

Abolitionist steps are about gaining ground in the constant effort to radically transform society. They are about chipping away at oppressive institutions rather than helping them live longer. They are about pushing critical consciousness, gaining more resources, building larger coalitions, and developing more skills for future campaigns. They are about making the ultimate goal of abolition more possible.

|Reformism at Work|

A highly publicized reform happened in North Carolina where sentencing guidelines were restructured in 1993. These new guidelines increased the cruelty of sentences for "the most serious felonies" while diverting those guilty of "lesser offenses" to non-prison punishments such as community service, electronic monitoring, residential drug treatment, probation, and house arrest. One non-profit agency celebrated the sentencing guidelines for reducing the state's "prison population for much of the 1990's." They also claimed that after the guidelines went into affect 10,000 to 12,000 people were diverted from prison each year.

To begin with, the non-profit agency's claims are at least partially false. According to statistics provided by the North Carolina Department of Corrections, the prison population actually grew during the 1990s. In the fiscal year of 1993-1994, the prison population was 22,848. In the following year, it leaped to 27,052. During 1998, the prison population reached highs well over 32,000. Clearly, even if the guidelines did redirect particular people who would have gone to prison, they did not lead to a decrease in the overall prison population, which instead increased dramatically.

In many ways, the sentencing restructuring helped make matters worse. The restructuring made life worse for a number of the prisoners by setting them against prisoners convicted of a different class of crimes. Also, the arguments in support of restructuring continued the false explanations used to support the prison industrial complex in general. In other words, they argued that restructuring was needed to punish "violent criminals" and keep them out of society. The reformists never called into question labeling certain prisoners as violent and making them seem evil. They never called into question whether punishment was an appropriate response to the harms committed. They never called into question whether or not prisons make society safer.

|Abolitionist Steps|

There are many different kinds of abolitionist steps. Almost all of them are changes (reforms) that could be used by reformists rather than abolitionists. How we struggle for a change and imagine its ultimate purpose guides what political ends it will serve. Here is a brief outline of some of those changes.

- Preservation of Life Reforms
  Ending the death penalty and putting appropriate health care in place.
- Quality of Life Reforms
  New or improved programs that provide better opportunities for education, therapy, drug and alcohol treatment, job training, art, athletics, and structured social activities.
- Prison Monitoring Reforms
  Oversight bodies that reduce administrative corruption, work to stop guard brutality,

and/or allow for greater prisoner control over life inside the prison.

- Right to Organize Reforms
  Changes in laws and regulations that allow prisoners to organize politically without the threat of punishment. Control units currently represent the number one threat to prisoner organizing.
- Prison Population Reduction Reforms
  Reforms that reduce the number of prisoners through either decriminalization, reduced sentencing, or increased parole (see Shrinking the Prison Population).
- Alternative Practice Reforms
  Replacing police, courts and prisons with responses to harm that reduce or eliminate state involvement (see Alternative Practices).

Exercise

Divide everyone into two groups. Have one group be "reformists." Have the other group be "abolitionists." Give each group 15 minutes to design a campaign strategy for ending the death penalty. The goal of the reformists is to end death sentences by seeking the alternative of "life" sentences. The goal of the abolitionists is to seek an end to the death penalty without reinforcing the prison system.

At the end of the 15 minutes, each group will send a representative to the front to make an impassioned plea for their campaign. After each group has presented the case, discuss what was learned. How did the arguments of each side differ? Why did they differ?

I am a woman who is a survivor of sexual and physical assault both within my family and by strangers...
As I questioned the effectiveness of prisons in protecting women from violence I realised that I had never once considered laying charges against any of my perpetrators. I considered why and I realised that instincively I had protected myself from a process that I assumed would abuse me and my family. I grew up in a low income working class suburb where the police were not liked. We often took drugs and were involved in petty theft as teenagers. Avoiding arrest was a matter of survival and I never considered the police to be my allies. Male friends of mine reported being bashed by police and we were often pulled over in cars and harrassed as teenagers.

As a young queer teenager from a poor family I never considered reporting a number of rapes that I survived during those years. Looking back I still believe I did the right thing as I had neither the inner resources, the family support or the money to adequately protect myself from a legal process that could have scarred me further and escalated my drug use.

Alternative Practices

Although people may disagree about the guiding principles for alternative practices, one way to develop a basic level of agreement is to think about what principles directly oppose those of the current punishment system. The PIC defines itself by punishment, authoritarianism, racism, profit-seeking, and state control. Ideal alternative practices would strive for personal and social transformation, accountability, equality, fairness, understanding, cooperation, sharing, solidarity, forgiveness, popular participation, and self-determination.

In the United States, an increasingly popular set of alternative ideas and practices is known as "restorative justice." At its best, restorative justice reflects the above alternative principles. At its worst, restorative justice represents the wanderings of middle-class whites. These wanderings tend to exoticize and romanticize the aboriginal cultures from which the main restorative justice practices come. They also tend to lack a critical understanding of state and corporate power. This allows the punishment system to take over control of alternative practices. Finally, they don't promote the self-determination of poor communities of color in setting up alternative practices. The title restorative justice by itself often raises suspicion from people from historically oppressed communities. Restore what justice? There never was any justice? For this reason, other titles such as "transformative justice" have sometimes been used instead.

|Transformative Justice|

Transformative justice usually defines crime as harm. With this definition in mind, the main goal of transformative justice is to repair the harm done as much as possible. Ideally, transformative justice seeks the transformation of individuals, communities, and society as a whole. Also, transformative justice at its best places the power to respond to harm back into the hands of the people most affected by harm. In communities of color, for example, transformative justice practices could lead to greater self-determination. The institutions of the state and of white supremacy would no longer control and dictate responses to acts of harm.

|Circles|

The circle is a well-known and successful transformative justice practice that comes from the aboriginal communities of the Yukon in Canada. At the very least, circles are usually made up of two discussion facilitators, the person who inflicted the harm, the person harmed, family members, and members of the community affected by the harm. In circles conducted under the direction of the state, lawyers and officials in the punishment system are also involved.

Following a set of core principles to which everyone involved agrees the circle goes through a process to think about the problem. First, the circle tries to understand the harm done. What happened? Why did it happen? Next, as much as possible, the circle designs a tailor-made response for repairing the harm and addressing some of its causes. The person who did the harm can volunteer to compensate the person who was harmed if damage to physical property happened. If a history of interpersonal conflict led to the incident, the facilitator can help come up with an

understanding between the people involved, disagreements can be mediated, and disputes can be resolved. Neighbors and peers can form support networks for assisting the recovery and transformation of both the person harmed and person who inflicted the harm. If the appropriate resources exist, counseling and drug treatment can also be provided.

Role Play Exercise

Use a circle to address a specific incident. First, think of an example of harm such as an assault that people in your group could possibly experience. Describe the important background information that you will all need to know about the incident. Next, think of the people involved and affected. In addition to the person/s harmed and the person/s who harmed, think of family members, friends, and community people who were somehow affected. From this list of people, assign different roles for people to act out.

Here is one example to help think about how to deal with an incident for which a young person is responsible for committing the act of harm.

Incident: One high school youth has severely beaten another high school youth to the point where the youth who was beaten will have partly deformed facial features for the rest of his life.

Background knowledge: The high school youth who committed the act of violence has an alcoholic father who beats him. Add other background details that might reflect your own particular community. Feel free to spontaneously improvise details during the role play.

Cast of characters: If possible, have at least the youth, their parents or guardians, two discussion facilitators, a high school teacher, and a neighbor. Other cast members could include sisters and brothers of the youth or classmates of the youth.

After you have taken the necessary steps to develop a situation and cast of characters, follow this circle process:

Sit in chairs arranged in a circle. Use a talking piece that can be held in your hands and passed from one person to another. This talking piece shows who is speaking. Only one person speaks at a time. The talking piece passes around the circle from one person to another so that all have an opportunity to speak if they want to. The facilitators will then lead the group through a discussion highlighting the following questions:

1. What values or principles should guide our circle as we see discuss both what happened and how we plan to address it?
2. What happened? How were you affected by what occurred?
3. As much as possible, what can we do repair the harm that has been done?
4. What can we do to prevent future forms of harm in our community?

Note: For some of these questions, the talking piece may need to go around the circle more than once.

When the circle has arrived at its final resolutions, step out of character and discuss the experience. What did you like? What didn't you like? Do you think circles are a potentially effective way of addressing harm?

|Some Traps and Limitations|

Because transformative justice practices are often suggested and set up by people who are not abolitionists, there are some potential traps and limitations for using this from an abolitionist perspective.

•In many cases, current laws regarding sentencing prohibit establishing alternative. But, alternative practices can be instituted by communities on their own without state intervention.

A Transformative Justice Success Story

In the Yukon, circles have been used for crimes ranging up to manslaughter. The successes of circles are multiple. First, circles typically do not lead to prison sentences. After the initial eight years in which circles were used, the prison population was cut in half. Circles have allowed the aboriginal people in the Yukon a significant measure of self-determination in a racist system. At its highpoint in the late 1990s, aboriginal people were 20% of the general population while they were 77% of those admitted to custody and 97% of those admitted to probation. Third, circles have achieved significantly lower rates of recidivism and have thereby contributed to lower crime rates.

•There is the danger of the practices being co-opted by the state in a way that actually leads to more people becoming entangled in the system. The state might use alternative practices only for relatively minor harms or conflicts that it would not even address otherwise.

•Transformative justice practices only address certain forms of harm such as those that occur between neighbors. They do not address harm brought on by corporations or the state. For these cases, actions of protest and resistance might be better.

•Transformative justice practices only address the immediate, localized factors that lead to harm such as alcoholism and interpersonal conflicts. They do not address larger societal factors such as deindustrialization and system wide poverty.

•Transformative justice practices are designed to address forms of harm for which responsibility is admitted and for which the harmed person voluntarily agrees to use a circle.

•Transformative justice practices have not yet been fully developed to extend to severe forms of harm such as murder.

•It is still unclear how well certain alternative practices work when major power imbalances exist between the people involved. For example, it is not clear how well circles work when both youth and adults are involved.

•The practices do not change certain parts of the punishment system such as policing or investigation.

Despite these traps and limitations, transformative justice is worth checking out. Some of the limitations such as its local scope in dealing with forms of harm can be overcome if transformative justice is paired with other abolitionist campaigns.

Other limitations such as the lack of proven alternative responses to certain kinds of harm will only be addressed through more opportunities for alternatives to be tested and more involvement of abolitionists in developing transformative justice.

Finally, the trap of getting co-opted can be overcome if transformative justice is suggested from an abolitionist perspective rather than a reformist one (see Abolitionist Steps).

|Other Alternative Practices|

Community Holistic Circle Healing Program

In the Ojibway community of Hollow Water in Canada, a different form of the circle practice has been used to specifically deal with sexual abuse. Community leaders estimate that 75% of the population are survivors of sexual abuse and that 35% are "victimizers." To address

this problem, community members took it upon themselves to create an alternative response to abuse.

People who plead guilty are sentenced to three years of probation. During this time, trained community members use an intensive program of assessment, preparation, and therapy to bring together those involved in a circle. As a result of this program, recidivism rates have been dramatically reduced.

Circles of Support

In Ontario Canada, "circles of support" have been used to assist in the reintegration of those convicted of sexual offenses into the community. This program involves volunteers forming support groups for individuals re-entering. The support group provides guidance, advocacy, and care for them as they adjust to life on the outside. The support group also assists them in mediating between the police, the media, and the surrounding community.

I am an abolitionist
in regard to jail and prison.

I was raped -twice- while I worked as a paid staff for SNCC in 1965 in Arkansas. I was 23 years old at the time. I am white, my rapists were African-American men. Both were young adult community members (college students) who were working with SNCC. In both cases I knew them slightly...

I could not imagine then or now turning these two individuals over to the police. The racial mix–black attacker - white victim; my understanding of how they would be treated by the police and the criminal justice system; my position as a SNCC staff member and the damage the publicity would do our organization; my expectation of how I would be treated by the criminal justice system and the press for 'putting myself in this "dangerous position"' of working in this interracial organization: these and other factors meant that it felt both unethical and personally and politically damaging for me to file charges against the two men. No matter how I had been hurt physically, emotionally, psychologically, and socially, I knew that calling in the police would have only been much much more damaging...

I continue to strongly believe in
community-based solutions to violence,
even if I am the person
who suffers from the violence.

WHEN WE USE ABOLITION AS AN ORGANIZING TOOL, it can be confusing how exactly to support abolition on a day-to-day level, especially when we work in coalition with people who aren't sold on abolition (yet). These are some guidelines, questions, and ideas to think about as you plan and evaluate your campaigns.

1. LIFE AND SCOPE

THE CRITICAL RESISTANCE MISSION STATEMENT SAYS "Because we seek to abolish the PIC, we cannot support any work that extends its life or scope."

What we mean by not "extending the life" is that the work doesn't try to make the PIC less harmful, or to fix it, but to make it less possible for the PIC to continue.

What we mean by not "extending the scope," is that any work we take up doesn't support cages that aren't clearly prisons (like mental hospitals or prison hospices) instead of prisons; it doesn't make it easier to feed people into prisons (by putting cops in schools, for example); and it doesn't validate any part of the PIC. So even when we interact with state agencies like courts or legislatures, it's done strategically and in a way that weakens those systems, not by appealing to them as potential sources of justice.

2. WHERE ARE YOU WORKING?

We organize in different ways and places, and we have to use different levers of power to undo the PIC. And while we have to work in as many ways and places as possible, we need to give the most emphasis, presence, and support to fighting the most harmful aspects of the PIC—especially within our groups. This can mean things like insisting on leadership from people of color, challenging heterosexism within your group, or highlighting white supremacy in your literature. It can also mean taking the time to work through how a campaign will connect the communities doing the campaign to the communities being targeted, and thinking about how fighting a specific part of the PIC can make the whole system weaker.

EXAMPLE It can be hard to tell when you're using state agencies strategically and when your appeal to a court or legislature confirms its power. For example, pressuring state legislatures to decrease funding for state corrections departments during budget crunches is a useful way to challenge PIC expansion. However, it's important to make clear that (most) legislators do support prisons and police, and that opposing the PIC isn't just a matter of balanced state budgets, and that while we might be able to force legislatures to support our work sometimes, it is always going to be a matter of political force (instead of a matter of faith in democracy or the idealism of a representative). Otherwise you might find yourself in some tricky situations (in one instance, activists in California pushing for cuts to the corrections budget recently were told that if they wanted to see a decrease in funding they should support cuts to prisoner education and job training programs). Sometimes you can work against this just by saying it: telling the media and people you're working with that a campaign is appealing to such-and-such state power strategically—not because you have faith in the government—can go a long way toward changing how people inside and outside your campaign understand that work.

3. Coalitions

As abolitionists, figuring out whom to work with might seem hard when not very many identify as abolitionist. At the same time, abolitionist politics helps you see broad connections throughout the PIC, making coalitions more necessary and more exciting. But in coalition work it can be especially hard to sort out the "life and scope" questions. Some things to think about are:

- Is the coalition's work abolitionist even if the members aren't?
- How do you relate to the non-abolitionists in your coalition? How are you working to shift their goals from reform to abolition?
- Who's indirectly involved in your coalition? Who funds the groups you're working with? What other coalitions are those groups in?

4. No to NIMBY

Not-In-My-BackYard (NIMBY) organizing tries to prevent something harmful from happening in one community by directly or indirectly suggesting it should happen somewhere else (someone else's backyard). A good example would be a group that organizes against a prison proposed for their community not by saying the prison shouldn't be built, but that it needs to be built in another place. NIMBY campaigns are sometimes easier to "win," because the project can still be completed, so all it really does is move the problem temporarily out of sight. Effective abolitionist work means saying "no" to the PIC anywhere and everywhere.

5. Healthy Solutions?

Part of building toward abolition is building other institutions and practices to maintain and create self-determination for communities and individuals. This doesn't mean that every campaign against a part of the PIC has to offer an exact alternative, but we should be thinking about those things—if you're fighting a new prison, what do you want done with that money and land instead? If you're fighting against education and health care cuts, where from state funding of the PIC could you get money (e.g. replacing cuts to education with cuts to the prison or police budget).

6. Whose words are you using?

What are the ways you frame the problem, your work, your demands, and your solutions? Do they rely on the PIC's categories of criminals, fear, and punishment, or do they help us to build a world where we are accountable to each other and adress harm by providing for our collective and individual needs? Does your language help broaden people's general vision of fighting the PIC, or does it only spotlight a particular problem?

7. Short- to Long-term

How does your current project contribute to abolition? Does it offer immediate support to people harmed by the PIC? Is it a movement-building or educational tool? Does it connect issues that seem separate? What is it going to make possible down the line?

> I think that as we develop prison abolitionism, we also need to build on the visions of communities that have organized around the basis of identity. By that I'm not saying that we need to go back to this narrow identity politics where we can't work together unless we come from the same racial group, or sexual group or whatever, but I do think that sometimes the prison abolitionist language begins to erase the language of race and identity and sexuality, and to a lesser extent gender. And if we do that, then it becomes less—it doesn't seem so relevant to communities of color that are very much used to organizing within a framework of anti-racist, African-American, Latino language. So I think that we need to develop an abolitionism and an abolitionist statement and vision that is totally infused with the cultures of the peoples who are incarcerated.
>
> Julia Sudbury

Supporting Abolition
A Quick Guide to the Questions

Here's a shorter version of our questions about supporting abolition. They aren't intended as a checklist, but rather as a quick guide to some of the questions we think it's most useful to ask. They're things to think about as your work develops to make it stronger, not an entrance test for the abolition club.

|Life and Scope|

Does your work seek to make the PIC a less workable solution to problems, and to limit its reach over our lives?

|Where Are You Working?|

Does your work take on aspects of the PIC that are most harmful? Do you work to fight forms of harm like white supremacy, heterosexism and class prejudice both in your campaigns and within your group?

|Coalitions|

Are you working in coalitions with abolitionist goals? Are you working to help other coalition members understand abolition?

|No to NIMBY|

Does your work reject the PIC everywhere?

|Healthy Solutions|

Does your work suggest workable ways to maintain self-determination, meaningful safety, and collective health?

|Whose words are you using?|

Does the language you use challenge commonly accepted notions of safety, responsibility, and justice?

|Short- to Long-term|

Does your immediate work make future challenges to the PIC possible?

Keywords

These are words you'll find throughout this toolkit - we are defining them here to clarify how we're using them in the kit. These ideas are vital to the problems, struggles, and possible solutions we outline here, so we chose to highlight the terms below not only to help you with unfamiliar concepts, but to provide a framework for the rest of the ideas in the kit.

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Prison Industrial Complex (PIC)

Prison industrial complex (PIC) is a term we use to describe the overlapping interests of government and industry that use surveillance, policing, and imprisonment as solutions to economic, social, and political problems.

Through its reach and impact, the PIC helps and maintains the authority of people who get their power through racial, economic and similar privileges. There are many ways this power is collected and maintained through the PIC, including creating mass media images that keep alive stereotypes of people of color, poor people, queer people, immigrants, youth, etc. as criminal, delinquent or deviant. This power is also maintained by earning huge profits for private companies that deal with prisons and police forces; helping earn political gains for "tough on crime" politicians; increasing the influence of prison guard and police unions; and eliminating social and political dissent by people of color, poor people, immigrants, and others who make demands of self-determination and reorganization of power in the US.

All these things are parts of the PIC.

Abolition

PIC Abolition is a political vision with the goal of eliminating prisons, policing, and surveillance and creating lasting alternatives to punishment and imprisonment.

From where we are now, sometimes we can't really imagine what abolition is going to look like. Abolition isn't just about getting rid of buildings full of cages. It's also about undoing the society we live in because the PIC both feeds on and maintains oppression and inequalities through punishment, violence, and controls millions of people. Because the prison industrial complex is not an isolated system, abolition is a broad strategy. An abolitionist vision means that we must build models today that can represent how we want to live in the future. It means developing practical strategies for taking small steps that move us toward making our dreams real and that lead us all to believe that things really could be different. It means living this vision in our daily lives.

Abolition is both a practical organizing tool and a long-term goal.

The State

Throughout the kit, you will see references to the state: state violence, state repression, and state control. "The state" is at its simplest the government. It is the set of people and interests that determine the laws, policies, and practices (including economics) of a geographical area.

Many of the people most involved performing the state's power are those who benefit from it most directly.

For example, racism is a tool the state uses to maintain white supremacy and keep resources and power from people of color. The PIC is a tool the state uses to control people, maintain its own power, and legitimize itself by claiming that only it can create "safety" for people living under it. This is important since the state controls people not only directly through police, prisons, and surveillance, but more indirectly, by influencing how people and communities imagine themselves, what they can do, and what harm they have to put up with. For example, sometimes people in places that are more heavily surveilled by police and cameras (whether that is where they live or where they spend other time), limit where they go and when, change their behavior, or start to punish or talk down to others in their community who do not. In other words, the power of the state is not only an outside force, but gets internalized in the minds of people subject to it, too.

Capitalism

Capitalism is an economic system in which a small number of people maintain ownership and control of the means of production (the machines, factories, and land needed to make goods) and the ways of distributing and making money off those goods.

In a capitalist system, like in the US, the most people do not own the wealth, but are spread out into different classes depending on their relationship to production. Production can be anything from making the actual stuff, to working in service industries like hotels and restaurants, to holding stocks and other financial resources.

Many people who do not own the majority of capital still benefit from their relationship to it. For example, the middle and upper-middle classes have more access to the power and resources controlled by the owners than do the working class and poor.

It is important to understand that capitalism needs two things that are at the heart of the growth of and justification for the PIC. First, it has to constantly grow and expand. Second, for capitalism to thrive, it depends on a surplus of labor (here, labor refers to the people who do the work to produce goods and services). In other words, some people (or some class of people) have to be out of work. This unemployment creates competition among the working class and working poor for jobs. It also makes it easier for owners to set lower wages because the unemployed can be used as a threat to workers trying to get better conditions or pay.

The PIC is an important and expanding industry in the US. It fills spaces left open by factory and agricultural work AND it is a primary tool used by the capitalist state to control the working class (both employed and unemployed). The PIC controls these classes through increased state presence in work and labor sites and by warehousing poor people and people of color.

Criminalization

Criminalization is the process through which actions become illegal. Actions become crimes only after they have been culturally or legally defined as crimes. Ideas about what is criminal reach far beyond specific actions. What counts as crime changes across both time and space, and sometimes happens really fast. Often those changes happen because of political forces that are manipulating public fears instead of responding to them.

Criminalization is also what happens when entire groups of people are targeted by law enforcement for punishment and control. The criminalization of poverty, for example, includes controlling poor people through laws that make everything from public urination to sleeping in the park to participation in informal economies illegal and punishable. The criminalization of youth of color includes directly folding police forces into school security, as well as laws in many cities that forbid young people from gathering in groups as small as three on the street. The criminalization of immigrants means that "foreign looking" people get stopped on the street and in airports more often and are vulnerable to police brutality.

The process of criminalization is an important piece of the PIC. It is one of the tools that make it possible for police and courts to target specific actions as well as specific groups of people. It sets us up to believe that everyone who breaks a law is a direct threat to us and to our families. Criminalization also adds to the myth that social, political, and economic problems are really law enforcement problems—that safety of all kinds, including economic security, can be guaranteed by watching, controlling and caging the groups of people who suffer most because of poverty or racism.

Race & Racism

Race is not a natural category. It is a category humans have made up that classifies people based on physical characteristics. Even though it is made up, it has very real consequences in the U.S.

It is also a deciding part of who is targeted for control by the PIC over and over again. This is a result of racism - the use of race as a basis for societal inequalities. The creation of race and the formal uses of racism are at the heart of how the PIC works.

The prison industrial complex controls people by limiting their life choices. It does this by saying who can have access to what and under what circumstances (see Criminalization). In controlling and limiting people's life choices, the people involved in upholding the PIC are able to maintain the current balance of power (see White Supremacy, The State, and Self-Determination). And even though many people of color participate in the state and in corporations that work with the state, the state's power is still tilted in favor of white people. Prisons, policing, surveillance, and other manifestations of the PIC are made possible by exploiting racial inequalities and working them further into the fabric of society.

White Supremacy

The term white supremacy describes a system of power that has its historical roots in the European effort for social, political, economic, and geographical dominance. This system of power is also key to how the U.S. has been organized to systematically benefit white people and act out violence on people of color. This violence is not limited to personal hatred, but includes arrangements of society that limit the choices, opportunities, and safety of people of color. White supremacy concentrates resources, power and wealth in white communities and denies those things to communities of color on purpose. Of course, these benefits are not the same for all white people. Rich white people acquire more economic resources and power than poor white people.

Simple statistics about who goes to prison, who stays there longer, whose communities get policed most heavily, and so on show that the PIC targets people of color (see the fact sheets for more info). The common sense (see the Common Sense section of this kit) encouraged through the PIC also feeds white supremacy. For example, police safety materials and the nightly news encourage racist fears about who does crime by showing the same images over and over regardless of who actually commits harms. The use of these images makes it easier to impose policing, surveillance, and prison on communities of color. This burden, in turn, keeps white supremacy alive by removing or keeping down challenges to it. Historically these challenges have included struggles by people of color for self-determination. Without these challenges it is harder to keep resources and control from getting concentrated in white communities.

Struggles against white supremacy and the PIC cannot be separated. By putting anti-white supremacy at the core of how we organize for abolition, we can challenge white supremacy in all its forms and locations, even ones that don't seem immediately related to prisons or jails or police.

Gender & Sexuality

Gender is used to describe the ideas of male and female that have become common sense for us **and** the bigger idea of gender beyond just male and female.

For this kit, it is important to address both of these uses of gender. Both the opposite pairing of male and female and the wider idea of gender (including transgendered, transsexual, gender variant, intersex, and gender queer) play important roles in the way the PIC targets people.

Gender "norms" are ideas about what men and women should be and reflect the belief that there are only men and women. These norms are connected to white supremacy, heterosexism, and class prejudice because straight, white, upper-class ideals shape them. Gender is often used to portray people in relationship to the PIC. For example, people are often targeted by the police because of what others see as difference from gender norms. For example, transgendered people are often physically searched to determine their "sex" when stopped by police.

Police also target people based on stereotypes of people that include gender and race or class. For example, poor women and women of color on the street at night are sometimes stopped on suspicion for prostitution, while working class men and men of color are targeted as "loiterers".

Sexuality can refer to a person's sexual behavior. It can also refer to how a person identifies whom they are attracted to, have sex with or have intimate relationships with.

Sexuality is often closely linked to gender. Just as there are gender norms that tell people how they should act according to gender, there are also sexual norms that say who people should be attracted to and have physical and emotional relationships with.

Both queer sexuality and sexuality that falls outside the norms are targeted by the PIC (especially for women). This happens through intense policing of queer spaces, surveillance of women alone in public spaces, and the enforcement of laws regulating sexual norms. Inside prisons and jails, queer people are often vulnerable to increased harassment, segregated housing, and targeting by prison guards.

The PIC is a tool for controlling people. Both gender and sexuality are targets for control because of the important roles gender and sexual norms have in dictating a person's behavior and place in the US. The PIC depends on controlling people's bodies, both in public spaces and in cages, for its power. It uses gender segregation, gender norms, sexism, and gender oppressions with race and class to act on that power.

Queer

We realize that the word queer might make some people uncomfortable because it is sometimes used as a violent word meant to hurt and humilate.

In the kit, we use the word queer for two main reasons:

ONE, BECAUSE *QUEER* CAN TALK ABOUT A BROADER, MORE INCLUSIVE SET OF SEXUAL AND GENDER IDENTITIES THAN ANY LIST OF SPECIFIC TERMS (LIKE LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, ETC.).

TWO, BECAUSE WE BELIEVE THAT THE WORD *QUEER* GIVES US THE MOST RADICAL WAY TO ADDRESS THE OPPRESSION OF PEOPLE BASED ON GENDER AND SEXUALITY.

We also use queer to challenge a common goal of many mainstream gay and lesbian movements - seeking acceptance into the current system. Instead, we use it to support the goal of working to undo the strict norms of gender and sexuality that are so much a part of the PIC.
(for more, see Gender and Sexuality this section.)

Community

In this kit you will find references to community: community-based organizing, community-based responses to harm, community self-determination, etc. It is key that we think about how to define what we mean by "community," because sometimes we fall back on a common idea that a "community" is something that already exists, and that all the people in it want all the same things.

That idea doesn't work for building practical abolitionist tools because often we are trying to build alternatives to prisons, policing, and the rest of the PIC among people who don't always agree on how to do that or if we even should do this work to begin with.

Communities, then, are always being made and re-made. A community can be geographical (a town, a neighborhood, an apartment building), based on identity or situation (Black people, queer people, white anti-racists, people on public assistance), or something as small as a group of friends. When we suggest that we can find new solutions for confronting harm and creating real safety, we imagine these solutions beginning in communities—groupings in which people are accountable to each other and act on the principles of abolition in everyday practice.

Often challenges can be best met in groups of people who can create new ways to respond to harm in their immediate surroundings and among themselves, without involving the state (or with as little involvement as possible). To build toward abolition, our communities are essential. However, we have to be conscious about the different ways we group ourselves and aware of the different needs and concerns of all the people in those groupings. We also need to be in tune with the different pressures on and resources available to our communities. What a community is will always keep changing as the people inside it keep re-defining it.

Harm

In this toolkit, we define harm BOTH as something one person does to hurt another - from yelling at your partner to killing another person - AND as the effect of oppression or violence carried out by the state (see *State*).

Importantly, these kinds of harm are linked. This means that when one person hurts someone else, that harm can often be linked to the harm the state and economic institutions do in communities of color, poor communities, and other oppressed communities. We define harm this broadly to recognize that current ideas of crime are limited to ways that specifically target the communities that are also the targets of harm from the state. We also do it to challenge the idea that the best ways to address harm in our communities is through punishment and imprisonment. For more ideas about harm see the section Confronting "Crime," Confronting Harm.

Accountability

The idea that if someone does something wrong, they should be held accountable is often a driving force behind popular support for the PIC. In this kit, we use the term differently. True accountability means making sure that responsibilities between people or groups are met. It also means that each side's needs get met.

Within the PIC, punishment is commonly thought of as a tool for creating accountability. Usually the state, through the district attorney, the police, and the courts, claims to use the PIC to hold people accountable for their crimes. This means that they will be held responsible (to the state), given a punishment, and serve out that punishment.

We suggest that accountability has many parts. First, there is the accountability of people to each other, or individuals acting from a sense of responsibility to other individuals. There is also the accountability of groups of people to other groups and to individuals, or the group or society having a responsibility to those groups or individuals. In a broader model of accountability, society as a whole should be responsible to see that the basic needs of individuals and groups are met, and should not stand in the way of those needs being met.

With this model of accountability, responsibility for harm rests not only on a person who caused the harm, but also on the groups of people around them that respond to it, and, the steps taken to address the harm that meet the needs of everyone involved (not just the state). This model of accountability also seeks to provide support both to the harmed and to the person who caused the harm.

Self-Determination

Self-determination is the idea that communities should be able to determine their own dealings without being controlled or restrained by outside or government forces. Community affairs could include economic practices, systems for dealing with harm, housing and education values and policies, political structures, geographical boundaries, and relations with other communities.

To exercise self-determination means that members of a community are accountable to each other, and, most probably, that they have a way to make sure power is shared fairly. Self -determination as a principle was made popular through the struggles of oppressed people, primarily people of color in the US and internationally, for control of resources, power, and land.

Abolitionist efforts to bring an end to the PIC mean supporting oppressed peoples' rights to self-determination by seeking to abolish those racist institutions of domination (prisons, police, state/government armed forced, the CIA and FBI). They also mean bringing our desires, efforts and resources to those communities who are directly affected by the PIC's most aggressive and punishing institutions.

Many fighters for self-determination see imprisoning entire families as a form of genocide. They also see the media-assisted criminalization of both youth and resistance as low-intensity warfare by the government. This warfare is aimed at preventing the rise of liberation and movements for self-determination that can shake the very foundations of the U.S. from within. They see the police as domestic armies. They see the drug war as a plan to paint people of color as dangerous people who have nothing to contribute to society and, therefore, must be removed.

The PIC deliberately and fanatically prevents self-determination. Currently, most communities - especially poor communities and communities of color - don't have a say in how their resources are spent or how resources are spent on them. A concern for self-determination is one way of expressing the political desire to stop the attacks by parts of the PIC - cops, sentencing, environmentally destructive industries, economic exploitation, war-making.

Self-determination is also a guiding principle for abolition. While there might not be a detailed program for how society will work without prisons, police, or detention, the ideal of self-determination gives us a guide for how decisions could be made and for how to begin that work now.

(see also Liberation Movements and the PIC in the appendix)

Restorative Justice

Restorative Justice is a set of ideas and a set of practices. Restorative justice defines crime as harm that is done both at the individual and the community level.

With that in mind, the goal of restorative justice programs and practices is to repair and prevent harm by addressing the needs of all involved in an incident. It focuses on the accused, the accuser or survivor and the communities in which they live, work, or learn (see Alternative Practices section for specific examples).

In the United States, experiments with restorative justice have been mixed. Since many restorative justice practices have their roots in native traditions, their use has not always taken into account cultural features that might not translate well into mainstream US culture. However, restorative justice ideas and strategies can be very helpful in thinking about alternative ways of addressing harm and providing frameworks for programs that are not linked to the state's punishment system.

Resource Directory

WHO:
AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE'S (AFSC) CRIMINAL JUSTICE PROGRAM

WHAT THEY DO:
"The AFSC works with many groups nationwide to create a system that is not based on prisons, jails, and executions, but on the needs of both victims of crime and perpetrators."

WHY THEY'RE LISTED HERE:
AFSC is explicitly abolitionist. They have a long and respected history of organizing for social justice that does not rely on punishment or repression, but that rather stems from strategies that are based on healing and restoration. They have programs around the country (California, Michigan, Ohio, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Arizona, and New York State). The national office in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, coordinates the national work.

CONTACT:
AFSC
1501 Cherry Street Philadelphia PA 19102-1479
phone. 215.241.7130
web. www.afsc.org

That's why as an organization we've never really focused on the drug law reform. Because we've also opposed that false dichotomy between the good prisoners vs. the bad prisoners. The nonviolent drug offenders are the worthy ones and everyone else are the bad guys. We just won't participate in that, but in terms of the question: do we worry about what we work on will make things worse later on? Absolutely. It's like trying to stop the construction of these prisons—is that going to lead to overcrowding? Yeah. And is that going to be hard on prisoners? Absolutely. And we talk with a lot of prisoners about it. It's like, this could mean things actually get worse for awhile. But the longterm goal is: if they don't have a place to put more prisoners, they got to let you out. They've got to make some changes.

BRIDGETTE SARABI

WHO:
ANARCHIST BLACK CROSS (ABC)

WHAT THEY DO:
Support work for political prisoners from anarchist perspective.

WHY THEY'RE LISTED HERE:
While our efforts may not always be completely politically aligned with ABC, their work in support of political prisoners and to bringing public attention to political prisoner cases is among the most important in this country. They connect many people to political prisoners through letter-writing campaigns, prisoner visits, and a series of publications. They also have been an effective public voice for both for abolition and the cause of political prisoners. Their website, American Gulag, is a great resource for a range of prison issues.

CONTACT:
Chicago Anarchist Black Cross
c/o WCF, PO Box 81961 Chicago, IL 60681 USA
web. http://burn.ucsd.edu/~mai/gulag/abc.html

WHO:
Bar None

WHAT THEY DO:
Prisoner support, community education and outreach.

WHY THEY'RE LISTED HERE:
They are an explicitly abolitionist group dedicated to providing prisoner support. They provide consistent correspondence with prisoners around the country and use their community activities (such as the Pelican Bay Prisoners' Art Show) as opportunities to make an abolitionist vision common sense.

CONTACT:
Bar None
PO Box 1 Arcata, CA 95518
phone. 707.476.8724

WHO:

CALIFORNIA PRISON MORATORIUM PROJECT (CAPMP)

WHAT THEY DO:

CAPMP is a volunteer organization in Oakland CA that challenges the construction of new prisons in the state. They help rural communities (where most prisons are sited) ignite their own campaigns against prison construction. By building urban-rural alliances against prisons, they are able to link issues that are often kept separate (such as criminalization and environmental justice). They publish a handbook for towns to oppose prison construction and offer direct campaign support to activists throughout CA.

WHY THEY'RE LISTED HERE:

Their work effectively links the harm prisons do to host towns (particularly environmental and economic devastation) to the harm prisons do to the communities prisoners come from (which we talk about throughout this kit). They are also a good example of a group that keeps a very low overhead (all volunteer, no office space) which allows them to be flexible in their contributions to the work of other organizations. CAPMP doesn't explicitly identify as abolitionist, but organizes from an abolitionist perspective. Their work intentionally aims to build unlikely coalitions against prison expansion (i.e. trying to find links between ranchers and farm workers in rural California), which is not only necessary to stop such projects, but shows that prisons don't benefit anyone. They are a great example of an organization that intentionally maintains a relatively small size and overhead, showing a way to organize that doesn't require huge amounts of administrative energy.

CONTACT:

Prison Moratorium Project
PO Box 339 Berkeley CA 94701
phone. 510.595.4674
email. califpmp@igc.org
web. http://www.prisonactivist.org/pmp/

And another thing is, I'm very into locally, communities, whether it's a block or a neighborhood, to take leadership, man. Take your neighborhood back. Start it from the smallest little block or area. We need to deal with our own shit; we need to start being accountable to each other. Not relying on police, or not relying on the state to make our own decisions.
So I don't know, I'll do it in the littlest ways.

PILAR MASCHI

WHO:
CENTER FOR COMMUNITY ALTERNATIVES (CCA)

WHAT THEY DO:
Develop alternatives to imprisonment and provide services for people who have contact with the criminal justice system.

WHY THEY'RE LISTED HERE:
Although they primarily work with young people, CCA also works with adults to provide a safe space and programming including programs for court-appointed youth, mentoring and after-school programs, and programs for women in treatment. While their language is very focused on "crime" and on trying to help youth and adults live "productive" lives, they are also committed to showing the connections between alternatives to imprisonment and safety. Their ability to demonstrate how keeping people out of prison can make communities safer (and their emphasis on safety being important for both "offenders" and "victims") is important to the kinds of abolitionist strategies we've discussed.

CONTACT:
Center for Community Alternatives (CCA)
115 East Jefferson St., Suite 300 Syracuse, NY 13202
phone. 315.422.5638 web. www.communityalternatives.org

WHO:
DIRECT ACTION FOR RIGHTS AND EQUALITY (DARE)

WHAT THEY DO:
"Organize low income families in communities of color to win economic, social, and political justice."

WHY THEY'RE LISTED HERE:
All of DARE's main campaigns (Behind the Walls, Jobs with Dignity, and Police Accountability) are noteworthy in that they are truly grassroots efforts that are generated and run by DARE's members (low income, people of color) based on the issues that affect their everyday lives. Their leadership institute is also noteworthy in its method of more experienced members training less experienced members in organizing strategies. The Behind the Walls campaign is perhaps most closely aligned to our vision. While the members working on this campaign are not self-identified abolitionists, they continue to make efforts to place their work (primarily on conditions of confinement) within a context of up-ending the larger system. Representatives have also participated in Critical Resistance's NE abolition roundtable discussion and have worked in coalition with CR to continue stretching their analysis to include ideas about abolition.

CONTACT:
Direct Action for Rights and Equality (DARE)
340 Lockwood St. Providence, RI 02907
phone. 401.351.6960 web. www.daretowin.org

WHO:
E HO'OPAKELE (PROJECT RESCUE)

WHAT THEY DO:
They are a community based organization that presents an alternative to current systems of punishment. They implement "a restorative justice process to more effectively deal with the rehabilitation of our community members who have made mistakes in their lives which have gotten them involved in the judicial process. Our aspiration is to implement a complementing alternative to the existing judicial process with cases that would be better served by a more holistic therapeutic vehicle."

WHY THEY'RE LISTED HERE:
While they will still do some work with the existing criminal justice system in Hawaii (receiving referrals from prisons, probation and parole), they also receive referrals from community elders and are really trying to set up a model that doesn't rely on separation and isolation, but one that relies on reintegration and restoration. Using the alternative methods of Ho'oponopono and Pu'uhonua (see alternatives section), E Ho'opakele is creating a model that is based on rehabilitation and healing. We also like them, because one of the tenets of their mission is, " Stop the building of a new prison or anything disguised as a prison."

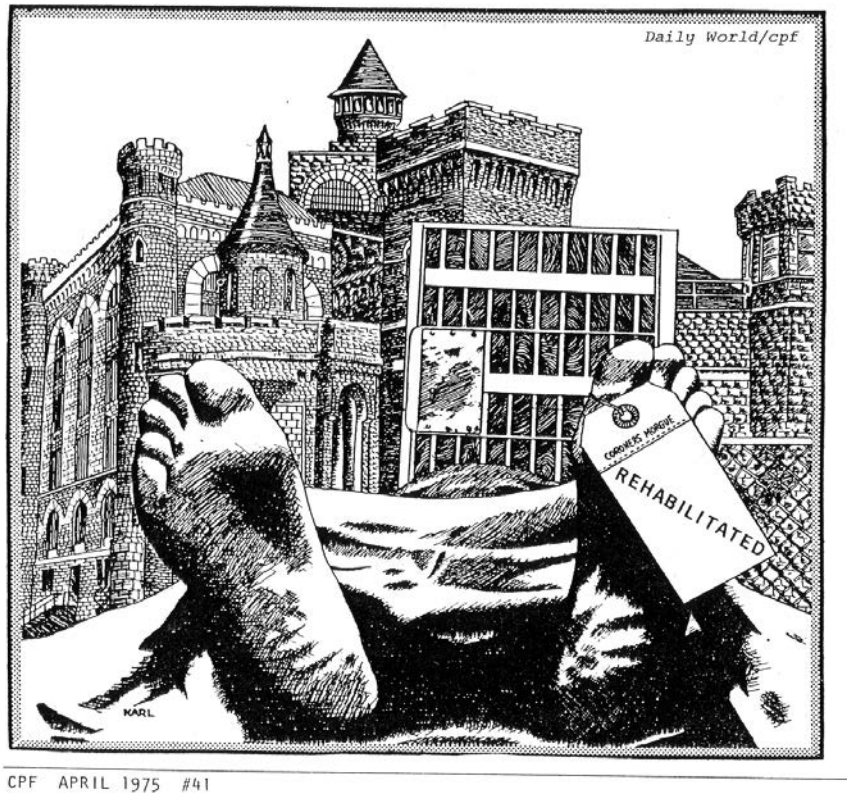
CONTACT:
E Ho'opakele
171 King Avenue Hilo, Hawaii 96720
phone. 808.935.4915

WHO:
GENERATION FIVE

WHAT THEY DO:
They work to end child sexual abuse.

WHY THEY'RE LISTED HERE:
They are a model of a program that while not explicitly abolitionist, engages in work that has abolitionist aims. Generation Five takes a holistic approach to the issue of child sexual abuse and understands it as an effect of the social systems in which we live. As such, they work to bring healing and restoration to both the abuser and the survivor. Generation Five also bases its work in a restorative justice approach, attempting "to infuse justice into community frameworks rather than pulling "offending" people out and placing them in prison."

CONTACT:
Generation Five
2 Massasoit St. San Francisco, CA 94110
phone. 415.285.6658
web. www.generationfive.org



WHO:
HARM REDUCTION COALITION

WHAT THEY DO:
Provide training and materials to serve drug users and communities affected by drug-related harm, as well as community organizing and coalition building around these issues.

WHY THEY'RE LISTED HERE:
From their website: "With American drug treatment and prevention policy rooted in criminal law enforcement and incarceration, most approaches to drug-related problems help only a tiny fraction of the people who use illicit drugs. We recognize that families and communities (especially communities of color) are frequently devastated not only by addiction, but also by arrest and incarceration, the lack of available drug treatment, infectious disease, poor housing, unemployment, etc." The Harm Reduction Coalition provides a great model of "meeting people where they're at" and plays a significant role in reshaping common notions of what makes our communities safe and secure.

CONTACT:
Harm Reduction Coalition

East Coast Office
22 West 27th St., 5th Floor
New York, NY 10001
phone. 212.213.6576

West Coast Office
1440 Broadway, Suite 510
Oakland, CA 94612
phone. 510.444.6969

web. www.harmreduction.org

WHO:
INCITE! WOMEN OF COLOR AGAINST VIOLENCE

WHAT THEY DO:
They are a national organization of radical feminists of color working to end violence against women of color and their communities through direct action, critical dialogue and grassroots organizing.

WHY THEY'RE LISTED HERE:
INCITE! is somewhat unique among groups working on issues of violence against women in that they are also explicitly opposed to the reliance on the prison industrial complex as a solution for ending violence against women. As such, they search for strategies and engage in dialogues that look for abolitionist approaches to the difficult issue of ending violence against women. Critical Resistance and INCITE! have jointly authored a statement on gender violence and the prison industrial complex.

CONTACT:
Incite!
P.O. Box 6861 Minneapolis, MN 55406
phone. 415.553.3837
web. www.incite-national.org

WHO:
Justice Now

WHAT THEY DO:
Provide direct legal services to women prisoners in California. They are developing Building a World without Prisons abolition campaign with women prisoners.

WHY THEY'RE LISTED HERE:
They achieve a balance between providing services that meet prisoners' immediate needs (such as those around conditions of confinement or medical neglect) and an abolitionist agenda that privileges getting as many women out of prisons as possible. Justice NOW is also a teaching law clinic that provides law students and undergraduates, and high schoolers interested in the law with an education in what it means to be activist attorneys. The co-founders of Justice Now serve as excellent models of lawyers who use the law toward activist ends.

CONTACT:
Justice Now
1322 Webster St., Suite 210 Oakland, CA 94612
phone. 510.839.7654
web. www.jnow.org

WHO:
JUSTICE POLICY INSTITUTE

WHAT THEY DO:
"The Justice Policy Institute is a non-profit research and policy organization dedicated to ending society's reliance on incarceration and promoting effective and just solutions to social problems".

WHY THEY'RE LISTED HERE:
The Justice Policy Institute provides us with the ammunition we need to do our organizing more effectively. They help us get the fact and figures we need to support what our experiences tell us is true. They are also great at bringing media attention to the fight against the PIC. Their publications are a good source of information about PIC issues across the country.

CONTACT:
Justice Policy Institute
4455 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite B-500 Washington, DC, 20008
phone..202.363.7847 fax. 202.363.8677
web. http://www.riseup.net/jpi/

WHO:
KENSINGTON WELFARE RIGHTS UNION

WHAT THEY DO:
" The Kensington Welfare Rights Union (KWRU) is a multi-racial organization of, by and for poor and homeless people. We believe that we have a right to thrive—not just barely survive. KWRU is dedicated to organizing of welfare recipients, the homeless, the working poor and all people concerned with economic justice."

WHY THEY'RE LISTED HERE:
KWRU was started by welfare recipients for welfare recipients in direct response to issues that threatened their communities. They provide opportunities for people who have been silenced and made invisible, to participate in the public forums where the decisions that directly affect them get made. They help people get the basic necessities that are so crucial to stability and survival—food, clothing, medical care, housing, utilities. They are building the movement by bringing in partners, while never forgetting that any movement against poverty must be led by the poor.

CONTACT:
Kensington Welfare Rights Union
NUHHCE, ASFCME, AFL-CIO
PO Box 50678 Philadelphia, PA 19132-9720
phone. (215) 203-1945 fax. (215) 203-1950
email. kwru@kwru.org
web. http://www.kwru.org

WHO:

MAYA ANGELOU PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL (MAPCS)

WHAT THEY DO:

MAPCS, run by the See Forever Foundation, is a public charter high school for court-appointed and at-risk youth. The school offers a comprehensive program to its students, including academic training, employment and business training in one of two foundation-run nonprofit businesses, after school mentoring, and residential support for those who need it.

WHY THEY'RE LISTED HERE:

The model used by MAPCS understands that merely addressing academic performance among at-risk and court appointed youth does not do nearly enough. The school helps its students gain employment experience and business skills while providing for the needs of their fellow students and community members through the part-time work that each student is required to do either in their catering program (Untouchable Taste Catering, which also provides meals to the student body) or in the Student Technology Center (which provides computer training to both students and neighborhood adults). Students are provided breakfast, lunch, and dinner at school, and there is limited housing for students who need a safe, stable place to live. This holistic approach parallels our idea that basic needs must be met as a foundation for building a world without walls.

CONTACT:

Maya Angelou Public Charter School
1851 9th St. NW Washington, DC 20001
phone. 202.939.9080 fax. 202.939.9084
web. www.seeforever.org

WHO:
PRISON ACTIVIST RESOURCE CENTER (PARC)

WHAT THEY DO:
They provide curricula, resource directories, and research and organizing materials as support for educators, activists, prisoners, and prisoners' families. They help build networks and produce materials that fundamentally challenge the rapid expansion of the prison industrial complex.

WHY THEY'RE LISTED HERE:
PARC is a crucial resource for the anti-prison movement. Their resource directory serves to connect prisoners, prisoners' families, activists, students, and educators with projects and services across the country. They are an important source for information about political prisoners and the struggles for their liberation. They are a clearinghouse for the wealth of information out there to help us fight the PIC.

CONTACT:
PARC
PO Box 339 Berkeley CA 94701
phone. 510.893.4648 fax. 510.893.4607
web. www.prisonactivist.org

WHO:
WESTERN PRISON PROJECT

WHAT THEY DO:
"The Western Prison Project exists to coordinate a progressive response to the criminal justice system, and to build a grassroots, multi-racial movement that achieves prison reform and reduces the over-reliance on incarceration in the western states of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Utah, Wyoming and Nevada."

WHY THEY'RE LISTED HERE:
Western Prison Project is a great model of grassroots organizing and leadership development. They do not identify themselves as abolitionists, yet the work they take up strikes at the heart of the PIC (including recent efforts on a prison moratorium in Oregon). They organize mainly with prisoners, former prisoners, and family members, and are greatly respected throughout activist circles. They produce a quarterly newsletter that provides excellent information and analysis, as well as fact sheets and reports that are accessible and easy to use in organizing.

CONTACT:
Western Prison Project
P.O. Box 40085 Portland, OR 97240
phone. 503.335.8449 fax. 503.232.1922
email. info@westernprisonproject.org
web. http://www.westernprisonproject.org

Bibliography

This toolkit is only a starting point for PIC abolition. This section is a guide to just some of the resources available to read about abolition. Some of these materials focus on how to organize campaigns against the PIC. Others explain alternatives to the PIC, like transformative justice programs. This is by no means a complete list. If one of your favorite readings on abolition isn't listed here and you think it should be added, let us know.

These resources don't all use the word abolition the same way. They don't all have the same perspective as the toolkit. Some of them argue that certain people need to be locked up. Some of them think it's a good idea for police to run restorative justice programs. We've tried to make a note of which ones have different points of view, but we think that each of these resources has something to offer.

Some of these resources might be hard to find. If you have trouble, we suggest requesting the book from your local public library through "interlibrary loan." This takes a couple weeks, but it's usually free, and you can usually get almost any book this way. We also have copies of some of these pieces that we can lend out.

We use the symbol * to point out a book or article that has language that's complicated. Most of these are academic articles.

Aptheker, Bettina. "The Social Functions of the Prisons in the United States." If They Come in the Morning. Ed. Angela Y. Davis. New York, Third Press: 1971. 51-59. Also available: http://www.prisonactivist.org/crisis/aptheker-prisons.html

The author explains how the PIC labels people of color and the poor as inferior. The PIC creates the idea that some people are "criminals." Since the PIC props up a racist system, it needs to be abolished, not reformed. This is a good starting point for looking at how activists talked about abolition in the 1970s.

Aptheker, Herbert. (1941). Militant Abolitionism. Journal of Negro History, 26, 438-484.

This article takes apart the idea that most people who worked to abolish slavery were white Northern preachers. Slaves and free Blacks were some of the most effective activists. Slaves risked their lives through every-day resistance and protest.

This is a good article for learning more about how people of color organized to abolish slavery.

Aptheker, Herbert. (1989). Abolitionism: a Revolutionary Movement. Boston: Twayne.

Just like the article above, this book tells the history of how people worked against slavery. The book is more detailed, but the language is actually a little bit clearer. This book also has a long section on political prisoners of the slavery abolition movement.

BAZEMORE, GORDON, AND MARK UMBREIT. (2001, FEBRUARY). A COMPARISON OF FOUR RESTORATIVE CONFERENCING MODELS. JUVENILE JUSTICE BULLETIN. HTTP://WWW.NCJRS.ORG/HTML/OJJDP/2001_2_1/CONTENTS.HTML.

This article explains four different kinds of restorative justice programs: victim-offender mediation, community reparative boards, family group conferencing, and circle sentencing.

For each program, it explains who participates, what the goals are, and what the process is. There are some good charts that show the differences between the different models. It also emphasizes how community gets defined in each model. This is a good source for getting an overview of how restorative justice programs work.

BRAITHWAITE, JOHN. (1996, 17 OCTOBER). "RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AND A BETTER FUTURE." HTTP://WWW.REALJUSTICE.ORG/PAGES/BRAITHWAITE.HTML

This is a good overview of restorative justice, what its goals are, and how it works. It explains how restorative justice tries to empower everyone that's been affected by harm. It also tells the story of how a mediation circle was used in one case. This resource is a good starting point for reading about restorative justice. It avoids some of the problems we've mentioned throughout the toolkit.

CALIFORNIA PRISON MORATORIUM PROJECT (2003) HOW TO STOP A PRISON IN YOUR TOWN.

This handbook is directed at people in rural areas facing prison construction in their town. It talks about prison construction as an environmental justice issue, and makes connections to other "industries of last resort" like toxic waste facilities, incinerators, plastic recycling, and similar industries that are located in poor rural areas. The handbook is also a great guide for anyone interested in the politics of prison siting in the US, and the impacts of prisons on host towns. For a copy of the Handbook, contact CAPMP (see Resource Directory).

CENTER FOR COURT INNOVATION, NEW YORK:
"PROBLEM-SOLVING COURTS: PRINCIPLES,"
HTTP://WWW.PROBLEM-SOLVINGCOURTS.ORG/PS_CHAR.HTML

"REFLECTIONS OF PROBLEM-COURT JUSTICE,"
HTTP://WWW.COURTINNOVATION.ORG/PDF/REFLECTIONS_PSC_JUSTICES.PDF

The first article outlines how "problem-solving" courts work. The second piece is an interview with judges in those courts. These are courts that refer people to social programs and drug treatment, and follow up with people's needs more than other courts. This is a good start for learning about people who are trying to change the court system. These articles still suggest surveillance as an alternative, and many of the solutions still depend on arresting people and using force.

(*) COHEN, STANLEY. (1986). COMMUNITY CONTROL: TO DEMYSTIFY OR TO REAFFIRM?, IN ABOLITIONISM: TOWARDS A NON-REPRESSIVE APPROACH TO CRIME, PP. 127-32. ED. HERMAN BIANCHI AND RENÉ VAN SWAANINGEN. AMSTERDAM: FREE UNIVERSITY PRESS.

This article outlines some of the problems of reforms. It points out how "alternatives" to the PIC often become part of the state. The author insists that despite the challenges, abolition is a necessary goal. This essay is good for exploring some differences between reform and abolition.

COCKLES, WISPY. "FIGHTING TO WIN: THOUGHTS ON REFORM AND REVOLUTION." HTTP://WWW.ONWARDNEWSPAPER.ORG/ARCHIVES/2-2002/WIN.HTML

cockles explains that we should push for "unreformable reforms." An example would be guaranteed housing for everyone. This is something that the system can't provide without changing in a fundamental way. This article is good for thinking about what kinds of reforms might make people better off in the long run.

(*) DAVIDSON, HOWARD. COMMUNITY CONTROL WITHOUT STATE CONTROL: ISSUES SURROUNDING A FEMINIST AND PRISON ABOLITIONIST APPROACH TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN. IN ABOLITIONISM: TOWARDS A NON-REPRESSIVE APPROACH TO CRIME, PP. 133-43. ED. HERMAN BIANCHI AND RENÉ VAN SWAANINGEN. AMSTERDAM: FREE UNIVERSITY PRESS.

This essay explains how prison abolition groups and gender violence groups can work together. It doesn't talk about any specific programs or models. But it points out lots of problems that a good community program could solve.

DAVIS, ANGELA Y. (2003). ARE PRISONS OBSOLETE? NEW YORK: SEVEN STORIES PRESS.

This clear, short book explores the racist and sexist history of prisons in the US and calls on us to move beyond prisons to build a more truly just society. Davis points out that there have been other abolitionist movements that once seemed unimaginable. She uses this idea to make a strong case for prison abolition.

(*) DE FOLTER, ROLF S. (1986). ON THE METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF THE ABOLITIONIST APPROACH TO THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM. A COMPARISON OF THE IDEAS OF HULSMAN, MATHIESEN AND FOUCAULT. CONTEMPORARY CRISES, 10, 39-62.

This article compares three writers' ideas about abolition. It's a good summary of abolition strategies, and alternatives to the PIC. It also focuses on ways of talking about harm, instead of "crime." The downside is that many of the ideas are really abstract.

(*) DE HAAN, WILLEM. (1990). THE POLITICS OF REDRESS: CRIME, PUNISHMENT, AND PENAL ABOLITION. LONDON: UNWIN HYMAN.

This book argues that punishment is unjust. Instead of assuming that there are no good alternatives to punishment, we have to work to create them. The author also talks about the pros and cons of moving to a restorative justice system. He doesn't say much about how to build alternatives to the PIC, though. This book is helpful for looking at different arguments about why societies shouldn't have punishments.

ESPOSITO, BARBARA AND LEE WOOD. (1982). PRISON SLAVERY. WASHINGTON, DC: COMMITTEE TO ABOLISH PRISON SLAVERY.

The first part of this book is a history of slavery, and the movements to abolish it. The second part tells the history of convict and slave labor for prisoners. This book is useful for making connections between different parts of the PIC, both past and present: slavery, punishment, forced labor, and prisons. The language is really clear, and there are lots of details.

"Gacaca Jurisdictions." http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~socstud/rwanda/

"Umuvu Tree Project: A Ministry of Reconciliation in Rwanda." http://www.restorativejustice.org/rj3/Feature/2003/feb/UTP.htm

"Gacaca, Inkundla, traditional systems of justice being looked at in the US as 'Restorative Justice.'" (available from CR)

"Gacaca" is a traditional Rwandan way of resolving disputes. Rwanda is now using this method to try to heal the harm from the civil war in the 1990s. These three articles talk about the pros and cons of using gacaca, instead of regular courts. The articles do a good job of explaining how the process works. They also pay a lot of attention to how communities and survivors feel about gacaca.

Hulsman, Louk H.C. (1986). Critical criminology and the concept of crime. Contemporary Crises, 10, 63-80.

The author explains why it's important to talk about "harm," or "trouble," instead of "crime." The article uses examples of different incidents (a traffic accident, vandalism, and a killing) to talk through some alternatives to punishment. It shows how changing the language we use helps us imagine new responses to harm.

Immarigeon, Russ. (1991). Beyond the fear of crime: reconciliation as the basis for criminal justice policy. In Criminology as Peacemaking, pp. 69-80. Ed. Harold E. Peinsky and Richard Quinney. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. (Available from CR).

This essay points out how courts and punishment don't really resolve conflicts, or fulfill people's needs. It tells five stories that illustrate how community programs could respond to harm. It does a good of job of describing situations to focus away from fear, and toward common sense.

Kanios, Chris Gus. "Mediation: A Progressive model of dispute resolution." Center for Guerilla Law. http://www.guerrillalaw.com/mediation.html.

This article explains what mediation is, and how it's a way to resolve conflicts. This is a good article for exploring alternate ways of addressing harm. The author does a good job of describing the goals and principles of mediation. However, it doesn't really give examples of what kinds of cases it might be a good process for.

Knopp, Fay Honey; Prison Research Education Action Project, et al. (1976). Instead of Prisons: A Handbook for Abolitionists. Brooklyn: Faculty Press. Available: http://www.prisonsucks.com/scans/instead_of_prisons/index.shtml

This is a handbook by and for activists. It has lots of stories of successful campaigns to get people out of prison. There's a great section on alternatives to punishment, especially for gender violence. It's really useful for learning more about the history of anti-PIC work. The book is a little bit dated, but it's a good place for tips on how to organize. We really recommend looking at this one.

Knopp, Fay Honey, Virginia Mackey, Mark Phillips, Nancie Zane (Prison Research Education Action Project). (1981). Researching your local jail: a citizen's guide for change. Syracuse: Safer Society Press. (Available from CR)

This is a toolkit on how to stop local jail expansion and help get people out of cages. It explains

how to get, and make sense of, government reports about jails. It does a great job of explaining how to use this information to fight the PIC and argue for alternatives. However, it implies that some people do belong in jails. All the research strategies can be used from an abolitionist perspective, however.

(*) Mathiesen, Thomas. (1974). The Politics of Abolition. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

This is a history of abolition groups in Sweden and Norway. It's written by one of the main organizers. The book focuses on how these groups chose their campaigns. The book is also useful for thinking about how abolitionist organizations can work with current prisoners.

(*) Mathiesen, Thomas. (1986). The politics of abolition. Contemporary Crises, 10, 81-94.

This article explains eight reasons why no more prisons should be built. It also shows how "reformist reforms" have actually led to more people being caged. It focuses mostly on prisons, but it does a good job of explaining a strategy for shrinking the PIC.

(*) Mathiesen, Thomas. (1987). A note on power and abolitionism. Contemporary Crises, 11, 403-405.

This article explains one way of thinking about "power." It tries to show that people who are oppressed have the power to make big social changes. It's useful for thinking about what concepts like "power" and "oppression" mean on an everyday level.

(*) Matthews, Roger. (1989). Alternatives to and in prisons: a realist approach. In Paying for Crime, pp. 128-150. Ed. Pat Carlen and Dee Cook. Milton Keynes: Open University Press. (Available to borrow from CR).

This article actually recommends building better prisons, and caging fewer people. It mostly criticizes abolition. BUT it has lots of good discussions of the challenges of building alternatives to the PIC, so it's a useful source for thinking about how to build alternatives that don't prop up the PIC.

Mauer, Marc. (2000). The Race to Incarcerate. The Case for Penal Abolition, pp. 89-99. Ed. W. Gordon West and Ruth Morris. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.

This essay is a short history of the prison in the United States. It's useful for making connections between the PIC and its historical roots. It's also valuable for reading about how the PIC in the US is spreading to other countries.

McCold, Paul. (2000). Overview of mediation, conferencing and circles. Paper presented at the United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and the Treatment of Offenders, Ancillary Meeting on Implementing Restorative Justice in the International Context. Vienna, Austria, 10-17 April. http://www.restorativejustice.org/rj3/UNBasicPrinciples/AncillaryMeetings/Papers/Overview.pdf

This article outlines different kinds of restorative justice. It explains more programs than the previous article, with fewer details. It has helpful diagrams that illustrate who participates in each program.

McMurtry, John. Caging the poor: the case against the poor system, The Case for Penal Abolition, pp. 167-186. Ed. W. Gordon West and Ruth Morris. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.

This essay shows how poor people are at a high risk of being locked up. The author counters the idea that prisons "correct" people or protect communities. This is also a good article for connecting the PIC to the global economy. However, the author uses animal imagery to refer to some prisoners.

Morris, Ruth. (1995). Penal Abolition, the Practical Choice: A Practical Manual on Penal Abolition. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.

This is a handbook on abolition strategies. It talks a lot about how to work with programs that already exist, to prevent them from propping up the PIC. There are also some sections on transformative justice. This is a good tool for brainstorming how to organize and educate in communities.

Morris, Ruth. (2000). But what about the dangerous few? The Case for Penal Abolition, pp. 101-110. Ed. W. Gordon West and Ruth Morris. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.

This article answers the common question of how to supervise the small number of people who might need separation. Thee author focuses on how we can prevent violence. She also outlines some basic goals for how to out treat people who create harm. The essay also pushes the question of what really makes us safe.

O'Connell, Terry. (2000) "Restorative Justice for Police." Paper presented at the United Nations Crime Congress, Ancillary Meeting on Implementing Restorative Justice in the International Context. Vienna, Austria, 10-17 April. http://www.restorativejustice.org/rj3/UNBasicPrinciples/AncillaryMeetings/Papers/O_Connell.pdf

This article describes the Wagga Wagga program in Australia. This is a program where police use conferences with youth, instead of sending them to courts. Although we don't think police should be involved in this way, this kind of program could be re-designed toward abolition. The article is good for learning how to bring a new program into your own community.

Zinn, Howard. (1965). SNCC: The New Abolitionists. Boston: Beacon Press.

This is a history of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. There are a few comparisons between SNCC and slavery abolitionists. This is a good resource for reading about how a grass-roots group organized its campaigns from all across the US.

Appendix

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EXERCISES

Below are exercises that we have suggested throughout the toolkit. We've pulled them out here to make using them a little easier, but it might be helpful to refer back to the sections they come from for background information that would make the exercise go more smoothly.

From "Why Do We Do This? How Do We Do This?"

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS {page 16}

- Why are you doing/wanting to do abolitionist work? Or why aren't you? What are your hesitations (whether you are or aren't)?
- What types of work does an abolitionist stance make easier/harder?
- How does being or not being an abolitionist connect to your political identity?

SENTENCE EXERCISE {page 18}

Choose one (or more) institutions to compare to the PIC. Decide on a set number of points of comparison. They might be:

- historical era and geographic location
- economic, gender, and racial systems in place
- environmental effects
- political justifications that keep these systems alive
- ways the state maintains these systems

For each point of comparisons, try to come up with one sentence along the lines of "Just like _____, the PIC...

EXAMPLE: "Just like Homeland Security, the PIC claims to be about safety and order even though it really makes the lives of most people—especially people of color--less safe and more disordered." Don't worry about making your sentences including EVERY point of comparison. Make as many as you want, and try to emphasis the connections that will be most motivating or illuminating. You can also run this exercise the opposite way: what are the dissimilarities?

CAMPAIGN EXERCISE {pages 19-20}

Analyze a campaign. One person or group might describe a campaign that they're working on or have completed. Briefly share an outline of what happened or is happening, then ask questions like:

- What cages were seen as the major problem in this campaign?
- What understandings of the political system did this campaign try to use and spread?
- What we some of the shortcomings? Who/What got excluded or downplayed?
- How could it be done better? What are ways to more explicitly tie this particular effort to a broad-based abolitionist movement?

PICTURE EXERCISE {PAGE 20}

On a large piece of butcher paper, draw the cages of the PIC. What connects them? For this exercise, fewer instructions might help produce the broadest range of representations.

FROM "CONFRONTING 'CRIME,' CONFRONTING HARM"

DISCUSSING CRIME {PAGE 21}

One way to undo harmful myths and ideas about crime is to critically assess media portrayals of them.

Consider the following study:

Many years ago sociologist Mark Fishman did a study that is still meaningful to today. Fishman looked at how the media created fictional "crime waves" with racially coded images. In a time when there was no evidence of an increase in violence against elderly New Yorkers, Fishman found that the three main newspapers of the city along with five local TV stations reported an upswing of violence targeting the elderly. The elderly were usually reported as being mugged, raped, and murdered by black or Latino youth with long criminal records. These youth generally came from inner city areas located near the residential areas of elderly whites that had fled those same areas. Because of the media made hysteria over the alleged "crime wave," new laws were created for more harsh and punishing policies such as longer prison sentences.

Discuss the following questions:

1. How is crime portrayed in your local media? What crimes receive attention? What is the race and class of those who are portrayed as responsible?
2. Does the media assist you in understanding crime? If yes, how? If no, why not?

DISCUSSING HARM {PAGE 23}

1. On one half of a large sheet of paper, list the general values you believe should guide responses to harm.
2. On the other half, brainstorm what you see as the main values and rules the government uses to deal with crime.
3. Compare and contrast each side of the paper. Discuss why the two sides differ.

FROM "COMMON SENSE"

LET'S START TALKING {PAGE 25}

Imagine that people in your neighborhood are starting a "Neighborhood Crime Watch" or "Civilian Corps." Maybe they're putting up signs telling people to look out for strangers, and suspicious activities. Or maybe they're trying to organize more community-based policing.

Now try to figure out steps to challenge these activites, either as a role play or in conversation.

- What is the common sense about safety this group uses? How is it related to their position in the area—are they old-time residents, or recent gentrifiers? Do they seem to represent the feelings of most people in your neighborhood, or only a small but vocal minority?
- How can you start from a desire to be safe from crime to start a conversation about alternative practices, or about the dangers of the program they're proposing?
- Where and how could you do this effectively? Would it help to talk to people one-on-one?
- Could you start a different neighborhood group that proposed a different model of safety?

What Makes You Feel Safe? {pages 25-26}

(This might be a good exercise to ask people to begin before a roundtable or teach-in)

This is a brainstorm exercise. Make a list of anything that makes you feel safe. Then make a list of anything that you feel compromises your safety.

Play around with ordering the lists:

- How can you group them?
- What are the conflicts within the lists?
- Are there things that make some people feel safe that others feel keep them from being safe?
- If similar things pop up on both lists (from different people or even the same person), why do you think that is?

Alternatinves to Punishment Role Play {page 26}

Come up with a situation where harm has happened in your community. For this role play you need a person to play the harmer, one to play the person being harmed, and others to play friends and family for both people. Remember that friends and family can be connected to both people—especially if the harm in question is in the setting of a family or neighborhood.

For the exercise, you as a group have to figure out:

A. How you're going to meet. Who will facilitate, especially when emotions are high? How will decisions be made?

B. What is the harm that happened, and how is it still felt?

C. How can you resolve the issue without prisons or policing?

If you can come up with a situation that is specific to the group you're working with, great. You could also look to the alternatives to punishment section of this kit, which has a similar exercise about circles.

Of course, if people aren't comfortable doing a role play, you can still set up the situation and have a conversation about it.

FROM "FRAMING ABOLITIONIST ARGUMENTS IN TERMS OF WHAT WE WANT"

Redefining Safety {pages 35-36}

Policing and prisons are held up as the only solution, the only ways to control problems and create safety. One positive way to talk about what we do is to challenge that idea by talking to people about what really makes our communities safe. What else makes safety?
Talk to people about:

- housing
- meaningful jobs
- self-determination (see Keywords)
- a clean environment
- being able to resist police control
- anything that makes people feel safer or that they imagine might make people in their communities feel safer.

Even in communities that are most affected by the PIC, people often still support policing and imprisonment and feel safer because of them. This shouldn't limit talking about OTHER THINGS that create safety, and moving the conversation to talk about positive things that can create increased safety and that may be longer lasting over time.

Sometimes it helps to talk about the limits people face coming home from prison and to show the consequences of people not having access to resources. Do former prisoners have access to the safety when they come home? It can be really helpful to get people to talk about what makes them feel safest - and where you (the facilitator) can see patterns that speak to things other than police and prisons, create a discussion about how to create more of that kind of safety in a community or home. It is important to help people realize the most immediate things they can do:

- find out who in the neighborhood can provide jobs to people
- find out where resources are for former prisoners or other people who need resources to survive and circulate the information,
- have neighborhood activities (block parties, cookouts) that can get people together and give people a space to talk over concerns

These can help it seem more do-able, since the idea of creating better jobs, housing, education, resources can be too much to take in all at once.

Ask people to imagine what makes them feel safe and build a project or vision based on finding ways to create that safety. Help the group brainstorm one idea they can put into action.

From "Words Matter—Thoughts on Language and Abolition"

Re-working Our Materials (1) {page 40}

Language works not only to define types of people in relation to the PIC, but types of actions, too. People fighting prison expansion or working to end the drug war often focus on taking advantage of public feelings about "violent" vs. "non-violent crimes", or concerns about locking up too many drug users and not enough drug dealers.

For example:

The drug laws drive prison expansion, fill prisons with non-violent, minor offenders, and drain resources from other services, such as drug treatment and education.

OR

Non-violent drug offenders are spending more time in prison than murderers and rapists.

Go over these questions about the statements above, and use them to help you write an abolitionist re-working of those ideas:

1. What differences are being made between violent and non-violent offenders here?
2. What is suggested about the use of prisons generally?
3. How could you re-phrase this information to be in line with the ideas that no one should be in a cage, and that putting people in cages helps no one?

Re-working Our Materials (2) {page 41}

Get out materials and literature that your organization(s) use (or that the state or other organizations use). Go through these questions to try to understand more critically what the language is doing.

1. Who is this language addressing? Who is it most easily understood by? Where is this literature used?

What categories are used to describe:

- •people
- •institutions
- •political systems and ideals
- •What political views do those categories back up?
- •What political message is being sent—how is or isn't that abolitionist? What is the role of cages in the political program being suggested or implied?
- •How could you change the wording to more clearly oppose all aspects of the PIC? Or, if you're using material you disagree with as an example, how does the language support the PIC?

Pick out one (or two, or however many you want to handle) words, and try to see how it is used, and how you might use it in a more radical way. For example, you might choose "punishment."

- •Brainstorm all the meanings it has—whose agenda(s) do those meanings serve?
- •What other words is it closely connected to? What do those connections do?
- •Where do you hear this word used most often? By whom?

- What other words address some of the same issues and assumptions in different ways?
- Are there ways to use the word "against itself"—to use it in a way that challenges the way it's most commonly used right now?

The point here is not just to change the words we use, but to examine how changing our words changes what we can see. It can also help point out what assumptions we might decide to hold onto. Maybe there is a difference between stealing a stereo and hurting another person. But saying non-violent and violent is only one way to show that difference, one set up by the state through its laws. We endorse that state action every time we use this difference. What are more complex ways to struggle with that difference?

FROM "ABOLITIONIST STEPS"

Abolition and Reform {page 50}

Divide everyone into two groups. Have one group be "reformists." Have the other group be "abolitionists." Give each group 15 minutes to design a campaign strategy for ending the death penalty. The goal of the reformists is to end death sentences by seeking the alternative of "life" sentences. The goal of the abolitionists is to seek an end to the death penalty without reinforcing the prison system.

At the end of the 15 minutes, each group will send a representative to the front to make an impassioned plea for their campaign. After each group has presented the case, discuss what was learned. How did the arguments of each side differ? Why did they differ?

FROM "ALTERNATIVE PRACTICES"

Alternative Practice Role Play {page 52}

Use a circle to address a specific incident. First, think of an example of harm such as an assault that people in your group could possibly experience. Describe the important background information that you will all need to know about the incident. Next, think of the people involved and affected. In addition to the person/s harmed and the person/s who harmed, think of family members, friends, and community people who were somehow affected. From this list of people, assign different roles for people to act out.

Here is one example to help think about how to deal with an incident for which a young person is responsible for committing the act of harm.

Incident: One high school youth has severely beaten another high school youth to the point where the youth who was beaten will have partly deformed facial features for the rest of his life.

Background knowledge: The high school youth who committed the act of violence has an alcoholic father who beats him. Add other background details that might reflect your own particular community. Feel free to spontaneously improvise details during the role play.

Cast of characters: If possible, have at least the youth, their parents or guardians, two discussion facilitators, a high school teacher, and a neighbor. Other cast members could include sisters and brothers of the youth or classmates of the youth.

After you have taken the necessary steps to develop a situation and cast of characters, follow this circle process:

Sit in chairs arranged in a circle. Use a talking piece that can be held in your hands and passed from one person to another. This talking piece shows who is speaking. Only one person speaks at a time. The talking piece passes around the circle from one person to another so that all have an opportunity to speak if they want to. The facilitators will then lead the group through a discussion highlighting the following questions:

1. What values or principles should guide our circle as we see discuss both what happened and how we plan to address it?
2. What happened? How were you affected by what occurred?
3. As much as possible, what can we do repair the harm that has been done?
4. What can we do to prevent future forms of harm in our community?

Note: For some of these questions, the talking piece may need to go around the circle more than once.

When the circle has arrived at its final resolutions, step out of character and discuss the experience. What did you like? What didn't you like? Do you think circles are a potentially effective way of addressing harm?

OTHER EXERCISES

These activities are based on ideas from an American Friends Service Committee youth education manual.

(1) Workshop facilitators begin with a statement that that each participant completes in turn. This allows people to learn about other participants and appreciate their commonalities and differences. The questions should be easy to answer, and they should allow people to speak from the "I" perspective. This activity can be done at a fast pace. Examples of possible statements to use:

- "The thing I hate most about the PIC is..."
- "If I could change one thing about prisons..."
- "An idea or social struggle I admire is..."
- "Something I hope to get from this workshop is..."
- "One thing I can do as abolitionist is..."

(2) Use newsprint and a marker to have a ten minute conversation where people think of what they need to know to be an effective abolitionist. On the newsprint, write down how people answer "I'm wondering how to..."

(3) Draw a picture of a person holding a toolbox. Draw a little bulb next to the head. Draw a heart on the person.

Give three sticky notes to each participant.
Ask them to write the following on the notes. First, ask them to write down a thought they

had during the workshop. Second, ask them to write down a feeling they had during the workshop. Third, ask them to write down a skill or tool they have learned. They shouldn't put their names on the notes.

Ask them to place the thoughts on the light bulb, the feelings on the heart, and the tools on the toolbox. When everyone is done, read the answers aloud.

4) Ask the group to count off by twos. Ask the "ones" to move their chairs to form an inner circle that faces outward so that each "one" faces a "two" who is part of an outer circle that faces inward.

Explain that you will ask a question, and that the "ones" should answer, speaking about one minute. When a minute has passed, stop everyone. Have the twos answer the question. When their minute is complete, ask the outer circle to move one chair, clockwise.

Repeat the process with another question. At the end of this round, ask the inner circle to move one chair, counter clockwise. Repeat this process until all questions are asked.

5) Ask for two volunteers or invite two specific participants to be initial "fish" (if you invite two people, let them know in advance so they can think about what they will say).

Place three chairs so that they are surrounded by either a circle or a half-circle. Have the two fish sit in two of the three chairs in the center. Explain that the two volunteers are fish and that they rest are observers. The first two fish will discuss the idea of organizing for abolition based upon their experiences and ideas. The rest of the group watches and cannot participate. However, after the conversation has progressed for a few minutes, the observers can begin become fish by either taking the empty third chair or by replacing one of the fish by tapping them on the shoulder. The observers enter a conversation already in progress.

Fish may leave their seat at any time to become an observer. When the conversation has run its course or come to the end of the time limit, allow observers to ask questions or make comments directed at any of the present or former fishes.

Then, debrief as a group. Ask what people learned. Ask what people would like to learn about more or explore more. Ask what made for effective communication and what didn't. Write down the answers on newsprint for everyone to see.

6) Form small groups. Ask groups to discuss what a just society (or a society without the PIC) would look like. How would it handle work, food, crime, children, education, etc.? Have the small groups share their vision with the larger group. Ask the small groups to visualize living in their community. Ask them what it would take to get from how their community is now to a more just community. Encourage them to be concrete in thinking of the steps that would be needed. Share some of these steps with the larger group.

Survivors' Statements

1.

I am an abolitionist in regard to jail and prison.

I was raped -twice- while I worked as a paid staff for SNCC in 1965 in Arkansas. I was 23 years old at the time. I am white, my rapists were African-American men. Both were young adult community members (college students) who were working with SNCC. In both cases I knew them slightly.

The first rape occurred during a late party in the housing complex where I was staying (but in a different apartment than the one I shared with several other SNCC staff and volunteers). Although I fought the rape and called for help, no one answered my cries.

The second rape happened about a week later and involved a friend of the first person who raped me. This second rape also occurred in the same housing complex, this time in the apartment where I lived. None of my housemates were home. The second time, I fought my attacker unsuccessfully, but didn't call loudly for help, because I was so discouraged from my first experience.

I could not imagine then or now turning these two individuals over to the police. The racial mix--black attacker-white victim; my understanding of how they would be treated by the police and the criminal justice system; my position as a SNCC staff member and the damage the publicity would do our organization; my expectation of how I would be treated by the criminal justice system and the press for 'putting myself in this "dangerous position"' of working in this interracial organization: these and other factors meant that it felt both unethical and personally and politically damaging for me to file charges against the two men. No matter how I had been hurt physically, emotionally, psychologically, and socially, I knew that calling in the police would have only been much much more damaging.

Instead, I discussed the situation with other SNCC staff and at my request, the men were banned from any further contact with our organization. They were confronted by African-American male staff in SNCC, strongly criticized, and permanently denied access to our office, to our demonstrations, meetings, etc. Basically they were shunned from the movement community. When anyone asked why, they were told the reason. As far as I know, I don't think my name or my race was repeated to those who didn't know the details. Although some movement people who knew me wanted to do some kind of violence to the men, I was opposed to that. SNCC had a non-violent goal for all its conscious actions. Violence was not appropriate. I continued to work for SNCC as the Freedom Center coordinator for the state for another 9 months--when I had to leave for commitments elsewhere. I have also been active in anti-racist and other organizing work in the ensuing 38 years.

I still believe that the treatment these two men received was appropriate to the situation. If there had been other community-based organizations that could have done more, that would have been good, but I never doubted not going to the police.

If I were ever raped again, I do not think I would automatically want the perpetrator to go to jail or prison. I would definitely do something and I would want to have community support demonstrated in some kind of action(s). The response that I would want would depend on the circumstances, (including the nature of the attack, age, motivation, level of violence, community atmosphere, acquaintance or stranger, repeat behavior, and so on).

Writing this email reminds how much I do not want to ever go through a rape again, but it also reminds me that our criminal justice system and prisons are horribly damaging and neither restorative nor rehabilitative. This is especially so when the crime victim is a white female and the perpetrator is an African-American man. I believe that the U.S. criminal justice system, and especially the jail and prison component of it, is a genocidal institution, directed especially at the African-American community. I cannot in good conscience participate in sending anyone into it. In addition, I am convinced that this system is much more likely to generate men who will rape than men who respect and care for friends and strangers.

I continue to strongly believe in community-based solutions to violence, even if I am the person who suffers from the violence.

2.

I am a woman who is a survivor of sexual and physical assault both within my family and by strangers. Like many adult women who have histories of childhood sexual and physical assault one of the impacts on my life has been a lasting fear of men and their capacity for violence. As an abolition activist I have struggled with the question of what to do with male perpetrators of violence. If not prison time then what? I have not always advocated the view that all people deserve to avoid being locked up. Like many feminists I feared a world without prisons. If there are no places to remove violent men to then what will happen to us women? I was angry with violent men and I didn't want to think about life from their perspective. As I have grown older and spent extensive time in counselling healing my own wounds from abuse I have come to see past the pain and anger towards men and I have allowed myself to accept that male prisoners are humans as well and are often sexually assaulted in prison.

As I questioned the effectiveness of prisons in protecting women from violence I realised that I had never once considered laying charges against any of my perpetrators. I considered why and I realised that instinctively I had protected myself from a process that I assumed would abuse me and my family. I grew up in a low income working class suburb where the police were not liked. We often took drugs and were involved in petty theft as teenagers. Avoiding arrest was a matter of survival and I never considered the police to be my allies. Male friends of mine reported being bashed by police and we were often pulled over in cars and harassed as teenagers. As a young queer teenager from a poor family I never considered reporting a number of rapes that I survived during those years. Looking back I still believe I did the right thing as I had neither the inner resources, the family support or the money to adequately protect myself from a legal process that could have scarred me further and escalated my drug use.

I have also chosen not to press charges against my father who was physically violent for most of my childhood. I am aware that if I did he most likely would go to prison. My father has been a hard man to love but I feel committed to sticking by him because he has genuinely changed during my adult years. I recognise that their has been a cycle of violence in my family that has been passed down from generation to generation and I feel that people in my family in their own way are trying to change that without intervention from government institutions. My family is very important to me and I would not send someone to prison as a way of getting justice. What I want is a loving relationship with my father that does not compromise my safety but I do not seek revenge for the past and I also do not take his shit!

Justice for me has involved finishing high school, going to university, coming out as a lesbian, accessing adequate health care to treat my mental illness, being able to earn my own income,

being actively involved in the women's movement and having the ability to create my own life away from abusive people in my family. These factors have meant that I am now able to stand up to my father if he starts to behaviour abusively as I now know my rights and am able to protect myself. In return my father has listened to my feedback about his anger and he has become a better person who is safer to be around. I recognise that some men won't change and I have no judgement on women who lay criminal charges against men which result in prison time. Until there are better functional alternatives what can a terrified woman do?

Through my own ongoing healing from violence I have developed a profound commitment to changing the roots of violence in society. I want it all to stop; from police, prison guards, men, politicians, businessmen and armies. I have learn't through my life experience that violence breeds violence and somehow we have to find a way to stop it that doesn't involve the revenge and cruelty of prisons.

3.

The existing criminal justice system was not designed to meet my needs when my 24-year-old son, Scott, was killed by gunshot in 1987. I found the police unresponsive to my inquiries. A Victim's Advocate called me, but only referred me to a "support group", where I found a very angry atmosphere. I, too, was angry, but began to look for healing.

Meanwhile, the state agreed to a plea bargain, which intensified my anger, since I felt the sentence given the offender was far too short. But I was told by the state's attorney, "You don't have any say in the matter. The state is the injured party. You are only a bystander."

I found, much to my surprise, however, that the plea bargain was a gift, since it enabled the offender to say, "I'm sorry," on the day of his sentencing. I needed to hear that more than I needed retribution.

I wrote to the offender and offered forgiveness. This eventually led to an informal victim-offender mediation, which was initiated not by the "system", but by the offender and me.

The healing that I sought has come (and is still occurring -- it is a life-long process). The help that I received from the system was minimal; it was basically initiated by me.

I believe we must make the system more victim-friendly, especially for those victims who are seeking healing. The system seems to encourage victims who are seeking retribution, since this becomes useful to the prosecution. However, the system is not equipped to handle those victims who want to heal.

As a post script, I would add that Mike (the offender) is now out of prison (I spoke on his behalf at his parole hearing) and is a productive member of society. This probably would not have happened if the system had been left to "go it alone." On the other hand, the principles of restorative justice (a term which I had not heard at the time) led to healing for both Mike and me.

Liberation Movements and The PIC

By Ashanti Alston

One of the most immediately key and sensitive touchstones for CR Prison Abolitionist organizing is National Liberation and Indigenous Sovereignty movements within People of Color (POC) communities. Why key? Because POC communities are not only those most affected by the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC), but are also, and long before the present manifestation of the PIC, most affected by the birth and prolongation of the United States of Amerika. Thus, there has been a strong thread of resistance alongside of the thread of racist, terrorist domination by this system.

Nationalism and nationalists (Chicano, African-descendants, Puerto Rican, for example) and Native American or Indigenous Nation activists and traditionalists who fight for sovereignty, have and continue to perform the role of the Story-Keepers who remind their own folks, their own communities and the world of the continuous horror of their respective experiences here.

Whether these movements utilize reformist or revolutionary methods to achieve their goals, their very activisms exposes the thorny issues of Racism and Self-determination within the general society, but also challenge the broader u.s. progressive and left movements on the same issues.

Historical memory is a vital weapon used to resist the constant cultural and intellectual bombardment of the U.S. to revise history or the "truth" about its oppressive relationship to POCs. The relationship between Native American/Indigenous Nations and the U.S. government/Bureau of Indian Affairs, Department of Justice and the PIC brings their peoples back to the memory of genocide, their present-day confinement on reservations and the government/corporate control of their lands and constant sabotage of their movements towards sovereignty. The relationship, for example, between La Raza (Chicano-Mexican) and the criminal (in-)justice system bring La Raza back to the memory of American imperial expansion which forcibly took Mexican lands and incorporated them into the u.s. The relationship between people of African-descent and the PIC brings Black people back to the memory of slavery and the 13th Amendment approving of slavery in the present-day prison system.

Prison abolitionist efforts to bring an end to the PIC (to prisons period!) means 1) to objectively support all oppressed folks right to self-determination by seeking to abolish those racist institutions of domination (prisons, police, and by extension, state/government armed forced, including the BIA and FBI), and 2) to bring our desires, efforts and resources to those POC communities who are directly affected by this system's most aggressive and punishing institutions. Some of the most active voices and organizers in these communities, and carrying a profound sense of their people's respective Stories and Dreams of freedom are the nationalists and fighters for sovereignty. Their messages reach the ears of the more political of the hip-hop generation and the politically conscious and politically hungry of the prison populations. Thus the very people we wish to reach with our own messages of a "world without prisons" and "stop the PIC" are more receptive to communication that connects directly to the particular forms of oppression that they face in racist amerikkka.

Most nationalists and fighters for sovereignty see the imprisoning of entire families as a form of genocide. They also see the media-assisted criminalization of both youth and resistance as government low-intensity warfare. This warfare is aimed at preventing the rise of liberation and sovereignty movements that can shake the very foundations of the U.S. empire from within. They see the police as domestic armies of occupation. They see the Drug War as a conspiracy or plan to paint People of color as "dangerous people" who have nothing to contribute to society and therefore, must be removed. Prisons are, thus, seen as concentration camps.

Identity or the issue of "who am I?" have always existed at the base of most liberation and sovereignty struggles within the u.s. due to institutionalized racism. It is essential that abolitionists understand that, through such struggles, this entails a redefinition of reality in Black, Indigenous, Chicano, Puerto Rican, Hawaiian, Asian images, agency, action and interests. That this re-claiming, many times, comes in nationalist language and visions should not be dismissed, but looked at as the stories grounded in that people's experience to capture / create their particular ethos of self-definition and struggles to be free.

Serious efforts must be made to understand the self-definitions, languages and visions of People of color, as well as their righteous angers and desires to organize amongst themselves. This is key to creating healthy space within CR for multi-racial organization-building as well as for building viable coalitions and alliances for combined struggles against the PIC.

Sample Agendas and Uses

(1) From the Western Prison Project:

Reform or Revolt?

Or, Can Abolitionists & Reformers Work Together to Dismantle the Prison Industrial Complex?

Facilitators: Western Prison Project

Brigette Sarabi
Scot Nakagawa
Kathleen Pequeño

"If we plan to redistribute wealth of those who have too much in order to give it to those have nothing; if we intend to make creative work a daily, dynamic source of our happiness, then we have goals toward which to work.

"And anyone who has the same goals is our friend. If [she] has other concepts besides, if [she] belongs to some organization or other, those are minor matters."

Che Guevara

"It takes less effort to condemn than to think."

Emma Goldman

"Loyalty to petrified opinion never broke a chain or freed a human soul."

Mark Twain

Definitions

Prison Industrial Complex:

PIC is a term used to describe the overlapping interests of government and industry that use surveillance, policing, and imprisonment as solutions to economic, social and political problems. Through its reach and impact, the PIC helps maintain the authority of people who get their power through racial, economic and other structural privileges...The PIC is both a tool of the state – used to control people and maintain its own power – and a system used to legitimize the state by claiming that only it can create "safety" for people living under it.

Critical Resistance

Abolition:

PIC (Prison Industrial Complex) Abolition is a political vision that seeks to eliminate the need for prisons, policing, and surveillance by creating sustainable alternatives to punishment and imprisonment. From where we are now, sometimes we can't really imagine what abolition is going to look like. Abolition isn't simply about getting rid of buildings full or cages (prisons and jails), but about undoing the society we live in because the system we are working to end both feeds on and perpetuates structural oppression and inequalities through punishment, violence, and the control of literally millions of people. Because the prison industrial complex is not an isolated system, abolition is a broad strategy. An abolitionist vision means that we must build models today that can represent how we want to live in the future. It means developing practical strategies for taking small steps that move us toward making our dreams real and that lead the average person to believe that things really could be different. It means living this vision in our daily lives. Abolition is both a practical organizing tool and a long term goal.

From Critical Resistance

Reform:

--n. 1. A change for the better; a correction of evils or abuses. 2. A movement that attempts to institute improved social and political conditions without revolutionary change. 3. Moral improvement.

American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language

Non-Reformist Reform:

A strategic approach that pursues "reforms" that either directly undermine the PIC, or provide support and assistance to those directly targeted by the PIC without strengthening the PIC itself.

Western Prison Project, based on original work by Critical Resistance

Reformist? Non-Reformist Reform? Abolition? – How would you characterize these objectives:

•Ending indeterminate sentencing (e.g. "1 year to life") in favor of determinate sentencing (time-specific sentences)

•Ending the death penalty by substituting the sentence of "life without parole"

•Instituting Alternatives to Incarceration: e.g. drug courts, mental health courts

•Instituting prison monitoring programs (oversight bodies that reduce administrative corruption, counter guard brutality, and/or allow for greater prisoner organizing)

•Improving conditions in old, overcrowded prisons by building newer facilities

•Organizing for adequate prisoner health care

•Supporting the creation of prison hospices

•Advocating for new or improved prison programs (eg. education, drug and alcohol treatment, job training, art, athletics, social activities)

•Advocating for decriminalization of drugs

•Advocating for increased parole

•Advocating for reductions in sentences for certain classes of crimes

•Opposing new prison construction

•Organizing against prison privatization

Questions to Ask Yourself when Working on Prison/Criminal Justice Issues:

•Does your work prioritize those most harmed by the PIC?

•Does your work refuse to make distinctions between "good" prisoners and "bad" prisoners?

•Does your work seek to make the PIC a less viable solution to problems?

•Are you working to help others understand the distinctions between reform, non-reformist reform and abolition?

•Does your work reject any expansion of the PIC?

•Does your work suggest workable alternatives?

•Does your immediate work make future challenges to the PIC possible?

Many thanks to activists at Critical Resistance for identifying some of the key questions above.

Feedback Form for the CR Abolition Toolkit

Your feedback is important to us!

This toolkit is a work in progress, and we want to make sure that the materials are helpful to everyone who uses them. If you use this toolkit in your organizing work or as a part of any workshop groups, please let us know how the materials worked. Use this feedback form to help.

1. How do you use the Abolition Toolkit materials? Where and in what kinds of settings do you use these materials (How many people participated? Of what ages and backgrounds? What were your goals at your gathering? How did you integrate the toolkit into your work?)

2. How would you suggest that other people use these materials?

3. Have you done any of the activities or exercises? What was successful? What could have worked better? What improvements would you make in the descriptions of the exercises? Are there other exercises would you suggest?

4. Are there any sections of the toolkit that seem incomplete? What seems like it has been left unsaid? What other kinds of information should be included?

5. Were any parts unclear? Is the language confusing in any places?

6. How has the toolkit affected how you think about abolition as an organizing strategy? What kinds of ideas have you had as a result of using the toolkit? How have your organizing practices been affected?

7. Are there any success stories you could share with us about how you have used parts of this toolkit?

IF YOU HAVE ANY OTHER COMMENTS, PLEASE FEEL FREE TO INCLUDE ATTACH ADDITIONAL SHEETS.

PLEASE SEND THIS FORM TO US OR CALL US A TALK WITH US ABOUT WHAT YOU THINK:

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Abolition Toolkit Working Group
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Resource Directory Addition Form

We know that the groups we have listed here are just a small number of the really great people doing work to end the prison industrial complex. You can use this form to add new groups into your toolkit's directory.

We want to know who they are, too, though! Please send us a copy of your additions (or just give us a call and let us know who they are) so that we can add them to the toolkit.

WHO (The group's name)

WHAT THEY DO (A short description of their mission or project)

WHY THEY'RE LISTED HERE
(A short description of the part(s) of their work that help end the PIC)

CONTACT (How can people get in touch with them?)